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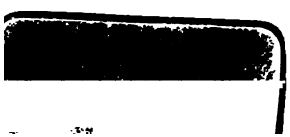

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MOTHER MOLLY.

"MADEMOISELLE MUST FORGIVE ME."

See p. 17.

Frontispiece.

MOTHER MOLLY.

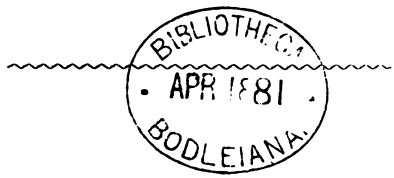
BY

FRANCES MARY PEARD,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE GARDEN," "CARTOUCHE," "THROUGH ROUGH WATERS," ETC.

"Britannia needs no bulwarks,
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
Her home is on the deep."

CAMPBELL.



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Dedicated to

ALL WEST-COUNTRY PEOPLE.

F. M. P.

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MOTHER MOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER MOLLY HERSELF.

"A ship sails afar over warm ocean waters,
And haply one musing doth stand at her prow,
O bonny brown sons, and O sweet little daughters,
Maybe he thinks on you now!"—JEAN INGELOW.

"'TIS very difficult, Nan, to please everybody." Mother Molly said this to me one day, I remember, when she and I were standing at the window, and gazing straight before us, where by a little craning of our necks we could see Plymouth Sound, and the grey water coming in with a steady rush as if it never meant to stop. That was one of the things which puzzled us as children; how the waves came on, and never looked as if they were going back again. But

as I have said, Molly made this remark, and when she had made it, she gave a little sigh, and both the words and the sigh were so unlike herself, that I left off looking at the sea, and looked in her face instead. It comforted me a good deal that I saw there nothing different from usual. She had small, delicate features, grey eyes, darkened by long lashes, very pretty hair—light brown, with a wilful curl which nothing could baffle—and cheeks just tinged with the fresh pink which you see in our Devonshire apple-orchards. Perhaps her eyes had not all the brightness which they generally showed, otherwise she was just the same, so I asked her what was the matter, knowing how seldom it was that she allowed anything to be difficult, but that when she did she never sighed over it. I suppose she saw that I was puzzled, for she laughed, and began to pull up my sash, which was always slipping down from under my arms, because I was so thin, and then she said, well, that 'twas about Dick.

This left me silent. If it had been anything to do with Harry, who was ten years old, or our Madge, who was three, or, still more, the parrot, who had been ailing for the past day or two, I should have been ready with my advice; but Dick was nineteen, two years older

than Mother Molly herself, and I could do no more in any matter that concerned him, than listen with the respect which was due from fourteen to her elders, and which, to do Dick justice, he was never loth to accept. And all this Molly understood, so that I knew something must have been hanging heavy on her mind for her to bring the weight of it to me, when Dick was mixed up with it. But though it was she who had begun, she was so long before she said any more, that I grew quite impatient; and she looked so steadily at the dancing waves, all stirred as they were by a fresh south-wester, that I asked her at last if she expected to see the French fleet lying off the harbour. For this was the year 1779, and our minds were very much taken up with expectation of the French.

"I am thinking about them, partly," Molly allowed. "At least, if there were no fear of their coming I shouldn't be so uneasy." She broke off again and looked in my eyes—"Nan."

"Yes, Mother Molly."

"You're as wild as a hawk, but as true as steel; you know father always says so. I'll tell you what frightens me about Dick—his thinking so much about that French Count."

"But everybody thinks much of him; and, Molly, he likes you so!"

She was leaning against the shutter of our little bow-window, and nervously twisting a little forget-me-not ring round and round her finger. And she was looking at it when she answered me.

"I would rather Dick did not bring him to the house, and I have told him so; but, of course, he is older than I am, and thinks it hard he can't choose his own friends. And I don't know but what it is," said Molly, with a sudden laugh; "only the truth is, I don't trust M. de Lantenac."

I opened my eyes and stared at her. We were all prejudiced enough against the French, but M. de Lantenac had fascinated everyone. He had been living in England before war broke out, and had stayed on; and his blithe good humour, his charming manners, and his romantic story, had carried every prejudice by storm. Though it was Mother Molly who said these hard words, I felt quite sure they were unjust, and told her so, pouring forth a string of his perfections.

"There is no one like him," I concluded vehemently.

"No," she agreed, sadly. "'Tis no wonder that poor Dick should be taken with his pleasant ways."

"And why not?" I persisted. "Molly, what has come over you?"

Her laugh broke out again, that laugh which was as silvery and bright as our sea looked sometimes in the early morning.

"I only wish I knew, Nan. I wish I had something to go upon wiser than just fancies. And for all that, I don't think they are fancies, I don't. It seems to me that M. de Lantenac asks a great many questions wherever he goes, and that he gets Dick to find out things for him, and that he may be collecting information to be used against us."

"A spy!" I cried out, horror-struck. "Moll, if I thought he were a spy I would kill him!"

She hastily clapped her hand over my mouth.

"For shame, Nan!"

"I would," I said, struggling away from her with my face as crimson as the June roses in a beau-pot on the table. "Father is away, fighting for the king in his ship, and I have heard him say that spies never expect anything but to be shot, and——"

I stopped in my eager rush of words, for Mother

Molly's bright eyes made me feel very uncomfortable and rather ridiculous, and with them fastened upon me, I really did not quite know how to finish; so I said, lamely and crossly, "But I am sure it is nonsense about M. de Lantenac. Dick says girls are always fancying things, and when he is so kind and has brought me a little box which he made himself, and tells us about his mother and his sisters——"

Something else stopped me again, but this time it was a quick kiss from Molly.

"Never think of it more, then, Nan!" she said, brightly. "Perhaps I am doing the poor man an injustice, and at any rate he may learn no more from Dick than from others. Grandfather wants me by this time. And, by-the-bye, poor Loveday is in trouble about her mother, and I have promised to spare her till to-morrow. Will you take out Harry and little Madge for a little while?"

"Harry likes best to go by himself."

"He will go with you if I ask him," Mother Molly said, gently, "and I think it is better."

Miss Hallam always said that a fit of heroics left me cross, and perhaps there was some truth in the remark; at all events, I remember that afternoon I was not

pleased that Harry should be joined to Madge and me. I had been used to dashing about in an independent sort of way, which my father, in his short home visits, was disposed to encourage, but I think that it troubled Molly, now that I was growing tall and out of my childhood, and Harry, even at ten years old, was always a grave and quiet boy, so that he acted in some degree as a check.

Looking back, I see that I have told something of our five selves, and how we fitted into the family; but a little more must be explained to make us quite intelligible.

Grandfather lived with us, in the first place. He was very old, with a gentle, kindly face, all wrinkled with delicate lines, and his hair was white and as soft and glossy as the inside of a chestnut. He was a clergyman, and had had charge of a parish in Exeter for more years than I can say, but at last there came a time when everyone saw that he was too feeble in body and in memory to go on with his faithful work, and then he resigned his living and came to live with mother and all of us. People there were who wanted him to keep it on and to let a curate take the labour, for grandfather made himself very poor by doing this, but he

never would listen to their advice for a moment. It brought quite a fire of indignation into his soft blue eyes, as if he had been asked to make merchandise of God's work. And my father spoke out strongly:

"He shall always be free of a berth with you and the children, Anne. But if he held on to the command when he was past giving orders or looking after his crew, he'd be no true father of yours, or servant of his Master's."

So grandfather came very gladly.

I think just at first we were afraid of him. He was feeble, and stooped, and when we made rather more noise than usual, he would look up in a sort of bewildered way which we could not understand. But by-and-by that wore off on both sides; he was so gentle that the roughest of us could not bear to startle him, and I think he soon liked the feeling of all the young lives about his life, and that the stir and bustle, instead of annoying, pleased him. He was no great student, but a lover of natural history in every branch, and Molly declares that he grew happier from the moment when he had interested me in his favourite pursuit. It began, I believe, over a black-beetle. If there was a creature I feared and hated in the world, it was a black-

beetle; but when one day I encountered one, and after a loud "Oh!" had rushed at the tongs, and in an agony of fear had managed to destroy my enemy, grandfather's wonder and distress were so great as to cover me with shame. He showed me pictures and told me stories about the whole beetle family until I was obliged to be interested; and to please him, I at last arrived at such a pitch of heroism as to hold a black-beetle in my hand. But I shall never forget the creepy feeling it gave me.

When grandfather—Parson Ridley, as everyone called him—came to us, no one would have thought that mother would have been taken first. She was like him in her gentleness and her soft, sweet face, and never very strong, but she hardly ever complained, so that we took her delicacy as a matter of course, though father sometimes held her at arms' length, and looked at her uneasily. I can see them now; he with his handsome, sunburnt face and blue eyes, and the odd old naval uniform with an immensely deep stock, and she, laughing and flushing rosy red at his scrutiny. He had been away for many months, when our little golden-haired Madge was born, and mother died. She would have us all come

Mother had always liked the house because it was airy, and we could get up on the Hoe without having to pass through the narrow dirty streets of the old town; and, besides, the garden, small as it was, was a great outlet and resource for active children who would always be doing something. Harry was knocking some pieces of wood together when I went out, and Madge was sitting on the ground by his side, gravely handing his materials. I had her little hood with me, and tied it under her chin. Harry stood up and looked at his work regretfully.

"Where are you going, Nan?" he demanded.

"Up to the Hoe."

"I wish you would go to Mrs. Harty's instead."

Mrs. Harty was the Miss Harriet Hallam who has been mentioned, and I knew Harry wished us to betake ourselves there, because as soon as he had seen us inside the gates he would have rushed home again, and we might have waited till we were fetched. But I was cross that Harry should be sent with us at all. A little boy of ten years old, indeed!

"No, I shall not go there," I said. "It is very hot, and I shall go where we can see the water and feel a cool breeze. But I can't think why you should come."

"Because Mother Molly told me," he said, quietly; and I knew there was an end of it.

So we started, the parrot calling cheerfully after us, "Good-bye, good-bye; say good-bye to Polly. *Allez, allez, allez, méchantes,*" which was what M. de Lantenac had taught him. And we went up to the Hoe.

About ourselves I have had to explain, and to say in the best fashion I could who we were, and what we were like. But everybody knows Plymouth Sound, and how there is no place to equal it all through the world. You climb up from the town, hot and breathless, but on the hottest day a cool freshness of wind meets you as you reach the Hoe gate; and there below, and spreading away to a far horizon, is a great breadth of busy water, catching every puff of wind and every flash of light, with Drake's Island lying across it like a toy, and the beautiful woods of Mount Edgcumbe sweeping down in a green curve on one side. And what with the keen salt smell in the air, and the boats darting in and out of the harbour, and perhaps a king's ship lying in Cawsand Bay—so long as the weather was not rough, when they would be forced to run for Tor Bay—and the

wind meeting one wholesomely in the face, I never knew a place so fit to sweep away the cobwebs, whether of fortune or of temper, from young and old. But I do not know whether I did not love it better when 'twas rough weather, and blowing what the sailors called half a gale. For then there was a roll of mighty waves so strong and forceful that it gave one a strange feeling only to watch them, and the scud would come flying before them, and the foam sometimes be driven right over Drake's Island; and, as it grew dark, far away in the heart of the hurly-burly, a tiny star would shine out from the Eddystone lighthouse.

And so on this day, the beauty of it all pretty well took away my ill-humour with poor Harry, and though he still held out that 'twas foolish to do no more than walk backwards and forwards, and see the gay ladies and gentlemen do the same, in his heart I don't think he disliked it either, and there was not one of us that could look at the Sound and not feel proud to think of father's ship, the "Invincible," coming up to Hamoaze with all her sails set.

As for Madge, she had Molly's sweet temper, and seldom troubled her head with wanting what she could not get; and she was soon so taken up with watching

two or three little ragged boys playing at French and English, and shooting each other dead twenty times over at least, that she kept us looking at them too, and we did not see M. de Lantenac come close up behind us, until his voice made us turn round.

"But this is charming," he said, in his pleasant way, "to meet one's friends here in this so beautiful a scene! And you, Mademoiselle Anne, you do act the part of the good protector."

M. de Lantenac was the only person in the world who treated me as if I were quite grown up, and, strange to say, I rather liked it. I say strange, because when others, without reaching this imaginative point, made appeals to my increasing years, and to the wisdom which they hoped might have been their fruit, I was apt to treat both ends of their argument with scorn. But with M. de Lantenac it was different. There was something in his courtly manners, in the attention he paid one's little speeches, and the general fine air which surrounded him, which seemed to me delightful. I think even now, when I look back, that he had a wonderful power of adapting himself to his company, whatever it was. Just at this moment I was startled by Molly's thought, and by his coming upon

us in so sudden a fashion, and I could do nothing but look at him as if I expected to see written in his face whether he were a true man or not. And never being quick at hiding what was in my mind, the bewilderment and questioning in my eyes as I stared at him, must have shown him that I had got hold of a doubt, and did not know what to do with it.

"Is anything the matter, dear mademoiselle?" he asked, anxiously. I stammered out, "No."

"Then you are distressed at something for me. You have heard something. You will tell me, I am sure; you are too honourable to keep it from me."

"It was Molly who was distressed," I said, still looking at him.

His eyes brightened. "For me?"

I did not notice his question. I was quite convinced that he could not have gazed in my face as he did if he had not been trustworthy. All the villains of whom I had ever read or dreamed looked down, or askance, or in some direction which proved their villany at once. But still it might be well to put him to a severe test. "You are not a spy?" I said, suddenly.

"A spy!" His eyes flamed, and he clapped his hand where his sword might have been. "If it had

been a man!" he exclaimed, and then all his wrath seemed to die out, and he made me a low bow. "Mademoiselle must forgive me. I see in her face that it is not she who believes this slander——"

"No, indeed!" interrupted I with eagerness.

"Nor her sister, nor one of those who have been so good to the poor stranger. For the rest I care nothing."

And he waved his hand with such a grand air, that I was near crying to think how Molly had misjudged him. Yet I did not feel easy in my mind, because he seemed to take her trust in him as much for granted as my own, and I did not like to hurt his feelings by saying otherwise; indeed, I felt sure that when I told her how I had put the question and had an answer, she would have no more misgivings. Still, it made me uncomfortable, and I was glad enough to see Dick sauntering up to us at this point.

My brother Dick was a student at the University of Oxford, but a severe illness had so prostrated him that 'twas thought well that he should come home before term time began, and he had been with us since May. This coming back had been a great vexation, for he was at the age to look down upon

womankind — or at the least his own womankind — and children. He liked books and poetry, and found none of his own age of a mind with him. For the Plymouth lads, such as there were left, were all a-fire with the ambition of knocking their enemies on the head, and by way of practice were not unwilling to try the trick upon their friends, and, in fact, their talk was chiefly of larboard and starboard, and how you might lie across the Frenchman's hawser, and pour in a good broadside, or what each one would do when the volunteers were called out again; and all this had no charm whatever for Dick, who was ready to fight if need was, but thought there were finer things in the world. I could understand him no better than they could, for all my sympathies were on their side, and it always had troubled me that I was not born a boy, and could not be out with father in his ship. And it vexed father too, I think, a little. But as I was saying, with Dick in this mood he would have chafed the more if it had not been for M. de Lantenac. He had read so much and remembered so well, that poor Dick hung on his words with delight, and prided himself upon being above the idle prejudice, as he called it, which in those times treated a foreigner with suspicion. I

don't think any of us were naturally of a suspicious nature, and Dick's generosity in this case had a strong liking to back it. As he came up now, M. de Lantenac took the best possible means to enlist it in his favour.

"No, my friend," he said, stepping back and folding his arms; "it is better you do not join me here in public. Mademoiselle, who is goodness herself, has just warned me that there is an impression abroad that I am a spy."

"A spy!" cried Dick flushing, and looking angrily at me.

"Perhaps it is not so to be wondered at. It is not to everyone that I can lay bare the secrets of my heart. People do not know as you, that this your England in which I have lived so long, is become dear to me as if it were my own country. For my France I weep. I see her faults, her crimes, her follies. I am clear-sighted enough to perceive that were she to succeed in her mad enterprise it would be her ruin. I cannot fight against her. No! That would be to demand of me that I should out-Brutus Brutus. But neither can I aid her in her madness. And so, my friend," he went on, with a sadness in his voice which brought the tears into my eyes, "I am a Frenchman, but—for a spy!"

"What fool's story have you been picking up, Nan?" said Dick in a fume, and I was so shocked and hurt to think it could have rested for a moment in my head, that I lost all wish to excuse myself. But M. de Lantenac stepped between us.

"Hush!" he said, putting up his hand, "you must not let your good friendship make you unjust to your sister. If she had not spoken so bravely, how could I have defended myself? I thank her from my heart. You and your dear family will trust me always, I know, and with that I am content. But we must not forget that others are not as you are, above prejudices, and if they see you with me here, they may suppose that you are disclosing to me all the secrets of the dock-yards, of the fortifications, of—I really do not know what it is that you should be telling me! I am afraid I shall never make my fortune as a spy!"

"I will walk with you in the face of the world!" cried Dick, enthusiastically. "Why, sir, do you think us so mean as to drop off from our friends because foolish knaves bespatter them with mud? I only wish I knew of something worth the telling, that I might show whether or no I trust you."

And as Dick said it he looked so bright and hand-

some that I could not help admiring him, and thinking again that 'twas pleasant to be a man, and able to speak when one had the mind. He put his arm into M. de Lantenac's, and held his head higher than usual, and the two walked off together towards the citadel; M. de Lantenac, who all the time that he had been talking with us, had stood hat in hand, making me a deep bow before he moved away.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. HARTY.

"Here at the half-way house of life,
Upon these summer highlands raised,
Her thoughts are quieted from strife,
Peace grows wherever she has gazed."

L. LARCOM.

I WENT homewards in a doubtful frame of mind. I was sure that I ought to have asked the question which had been answered, to my thinking, so triumphantly; but I was not sure that I ought to have introduced Molly's name, and it seemed that Harry, who had been pricking up his ears, made out from what I said that 'twas she told me. And though Dick was not present at that moment, the chances were that he would not rest until he found out; and he was always too ready to carp at Mother Molly. Not one of us

could stand that, and yet we were all on Dick's side about the Count, down to Betty the cook, whose heart he had won by praise of her curing of bacon.

So when we reached the turning which leads to our house, I stopped, and asked Harry, being in a meeker frame of mind, whether he would mind going with Madge and me to Mrs. Harty's. He grumbled a good deal, but finally, on my making a solemn promise to bring back with me a pottle of strawberries, consented; but he insisted on our running very fast, and poor Madge was quite out of breath when we came to the green gates. And there he left us.

Mrs. Harty was my Godmother, and we were all pretty nearly as free of her house as our own, so that instead of going straight into the house from the formal carriage-drive which went in a careful circle round a centre of turf, I turned through a narrow gate into the garden, where I was sure we should find her. Such a garden as it was! The scent of it seems to reach me as I write; and on that day, late in June, the air was quite heavy with sweet fragrance. Roses clambered over the house, and mignonette and clove pinks, and great white annunciation lilies, and lemon verbena, and tobacco-plants were there in profusion. The

grass had been cut that morning, and on the gravel-path before the windows Mrs. Harty was sitting reading with her favourite cat by her side.

She was a large woman, tall and stout, with no particularly remarkable feature in her face except bright dark eyes. Long ago Mrs. Harty has passed from her lonely life, to join those who had left her behind them for a little while; but looking back, I know, better and better as each year goes by, that no more faithful friend could have lived for us motherless children, and no brighter example have led us towards the way she loved.

She laid down her book, took off her spectacles, and kissed us both.

"Pussy has been missing her playfellow," she said, stroking our Madge's golden head; "and the strawberries are wanting somebody to eat them that will do it more nicely than the slugs. Will you pick them yourself, Nan, or ask Mrs. Smith to send out James?"

"Oh, please let me!" I cried, eagerly.

"Then put it off a little, and I will try to get up to the garden with you. We shall see Dartmoor clearly this evening."

"Mrs. Harty, do you know what Mother Molly says?"

"What?"

"That if the French come, they will burn the town; and we shall all have to go off to Dartmoor."

"Ah! well, don't leave it too late," said Miss Hallam, more gravely than I expected from her.

"But," I cried, incredulously, "they will never land!"

"Why not?"

"We should not let them."

"There's a true daughter of the 'Invincible,'" she said, with a smile, pushing back the hair from my face. "But suppose we can't help it?"

"We would all fight—*you* would fight."

"No, indeed," she said, shaking her head. "I promise nothing of the sort. Don't trust to me, Nan."

"There's something else I wanted to ask you, Mrs. Harty," I said, after a momentary pause; for I was a good deal disappointed at her want of martial ardour. And then I told her about what had happened that day; how Molly had mentioned her fears, and how, when I saw M. de Lantenac, I could not help asking

him straight out, and what he had said. "Molly will be satisfied," I ended, drawing a deep breath, "but I am afraid that Dick will be angry. What do you think?"

"I think you forgot your discretion in your zeal," she said, gravely; "and that it is Molly, not Dick, who has most cause to be angry. Don't you see that you were betraying her confidence?"

I know I got very red at these words. We had plenty of faults; but there was not one of us who would willingly have done anything mean or dishonourable; and it cut me to the heart that my Godmother should think so badly of me. I sat upright and looked straight before me with hot eyes. Mrs. Harty quietly took up her book again and left me alone.

"I don't know what you mean," I said at last, in an injured tone. "If Molly had desired me not to say anything, of course I should not have spoken. But she only told me what she thought, and I——I——"

"Told M. de Lantenac," said Mrs. Harty, quietly finishing my sentence.

The tears began to gather in my eyes.

"I did not know it was wrong—I did not think—"

I said brokenly, and she put down her book at once, and said, with a little impatience:

"My dear, have I accused you of any worse sins? For pity's sake, Nan, don't grow up a touchy woman! But now, let us just talk it over quietly. Does it ever strike you that Mother Molly has a great deal on her head and her hands? She keeps things going so smoothly that, perhaps, no one knows how much thought it costs her. There is your grandfather to be cared for, there is the house to be looked after, there are Betty and Loveday to be kept from falling out, there is your teaching, there are Harry's lessons to be prepared for school, there are all your clothes, and all your tempers; and now Dick home ill from college with a dozen tantrums; and bread scarce, and everything dear, and not much money to meet it."

My Godmother had said all this in a quick, odd way, and then she turned and looked hard at me.

"And don't you see, Nan, that you have been a child rather longer than most children, and no one has said anything against it? Mother Molly, God bless her! has carried her burden with a cheerful heart, though she was not much older than you when it fell on her shoulders. And if now, seeing you growing

tall, and almost woman-like, she sometimes takes a perplexity to you, and likes to talk it over and see what two sets of young wits can make of it, why then, my Nan, it seems to me that if I were in your shoes, and had a Mother Molly, I should be very proud of such a confidence, and should do my best to be a helper in it. You have done nothing wrong, but 'tis just as you said—you did not think, and so instead of helping Molly you will have made it more difficult for her."

I could not speak, but I slipped my hand into Mrs. Harty's, and she held it fast. It was from that moment, I think, that some new thoughts and feelings began to awake in me. I had always before taken a delight in being wild and reckless. To be like a boy had been an actual ambition in my mind. I was proud to be counted one of the most daring climbers in the neighbourhood, and quite indifferent to the long rents in my frocks, which Mother Molly's patient fingers toiled over so uncomplainingly. Somehow, the remembrance of that unwearying patience seemed to smite me more strongly than even my Godmother's words. I had never thought—no; but how much she had thought for me!

"I am going on," said Mrs. Harty, with one of her quick looks.

I nodded.

"If M. de Lantenac were really what Molly feared——"

"But you don't think he is!" I interrupted.

"No, I don't," she answered. "I think 'tis very natural Molly should be fearful about Dick, but 'tis the sort of report to which any foreigner would be subject, and most people seem to speak of him with praise. But if he were a spy, 'twould not be likely that he would make the confession to you, my wise Nan. That's all. So now, little Madge, if Pussy's daisy chain is finished, Nan shall go and get a basket, and you and I will set off for the strawberry-beds."

That was always my Godmother's way. She said her say, and left it alone, and I fancy 'twas one reason why her advice was always so well worth having. But I was resolved to ask her one more question presently.

It took us some time to reach the strawberries, for we had quite a hill to go up before we were in the kitchen garden, which lay to the left of the house, and behind. But when once you were there, it was almost

the best of all, what with the wonderful growth of the things. There was a long gravel path running through it, bordered with espaliers, and between the apple-trees and the fine gravel, a strip of gay flowers, sweet peas, scarlet lychnis, honesty, larkspurs, winter cherry, London pride, and a host of others. The garden was walled all round with a good cob wall, and deep coping of thatch, but it lay on the slope of the hill, and the wall followed the irregularities of the ground, so that on one side, where was a little summer-house, you could not only look down on the harbour, and in the direction of Saltash, but straight away towards the Dartmoor tors and their wild wastes. And for all that we were really in the town, on this June evening 'twas as quiet as the heart of the country could have been; just some smoke curling up between us and the masts of the ships, and the gardener scuffling—which they tell me is a downright Devonshire word, and none the worse for that, say I; and I should like anyone to show me another that expresses its meaning so well—the paths at the other end of the garden, and a blackbird singing its heart out for joy over its supper of strawberries, and that was all.

Mrs. Harty, who was never strong, was quite ex-

hausted by coming up the hill, and Madge and I left her in the summer-house, whilst we went to pick the strawberries. And there Madge, who had more fancies in her baby head than all the rest of us put together, except, perhaps, Dick, would prattle on about the blackbird, and what he was saying, and the funny things he thought about us, so that between this and the number she popped into her mouth, her picking of strawberries for the basket did not help it much, and it took me a good while, remembering, as I did, what Harry would be expecting. Before I had finished she ran off to chatter to the old gardener.

When I went back to my Godmother, the sun was setting; across the strange clearness of the sky lay bars of rosy light, so intense in colour that I could scarcely turn away my eyes. All the soft masses of wood which stretched away were lit by the brightness, and beyond them lay the dim and dusky moorland, here its outline marked by boldly-rounded sweeps, there broken by the ruggedness of great tors, gravely solemn in the sunset. Mrs. Harty only smiled as I came up; she had the far-away look in her eyes which we sometimes noticed and did not like to disturb. I had my thoughts, too, about Dartmoor, though I am

sure they were not the same as hers; for they had but grown out of that lately-hinted possibility that we might have to take refuge there. They were enough, however, to keep me still, and I almost started when I heard my Godmother's voice. She was only murmuring aloud, as solitary people sometimes do; I just caught a few words—"In Thy light shall we see light."

Then she looked round at me.

"Was I talking to myself? a bad habit, Nan, and unsociable, when I have you sitting by my side. But that is a sight which takes hold of one's thoughts, whether one will or no. Have you any more questions you want to put?"

"One," I said, doubtfully.

"Ask it, then," she said, with a kind look on her face.

"Mrs. Harty, you don't really think I shall grow up a touchy woman?"

"That's a question you'll have to live out, Nan; it depends on yourself as yet. But if you like I'll tell you why I dread it. I have, as you know, a good many visitors, and most of them unmarried women like myself. Generally they tell me their troubles,

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and some are heavy enough, but still more are so trifling and fussy, that if they were not so sad they would be quite absurd — little affronts and neglects, and repeating of silly speeches, and fancying everyone is set against them, till they make their lives a very burden to themselves. And when I think of my own disposition, I see how near I have been to falling into the same unhappiness myself."

"But you are not touchy?"

"I have a quick, impatient temper, and yours is much the same, Nan. Shall I tell you the little thing which once helped me about it? Some years ago, when I was a good deal stronger than I am now, and a good deal younger, I was walking in a country road past a farmhouse, where the only creature in sight besides myself was an old hen. I took no thought about the hen, and nothing was further from my mind than to prevent her from going where or how she pleased; but the ridiculous creature was so possessed with the idea that I was made up of designs upon her life and liberty, that she put herself into the greatest panic conceivable, and flew from side to side of the road, clucking and clackiting as though she were already being killed at the least. I said to myself then

and there: 'Harriet Hallam, do not you be like the hen!' and I have never forgotten her. Now go and bring Madge to the house, for Mother Molly will be waiting supper, and if Harry has not come for you, I will send James back. There is a parcel which he shall carry, besides three scarlet cloaks for Molly and Madge and you. I knew you would be satisfied with no other colour than the soldiers', with the French so near."

Mrs. Harty said this between jest and earnest, and indeed 'twas true; and Harry, when he saw them, would not rest until he had got Molly to make him a coat of the same.

We found that not Harry but Betty had just come for us, and she was in a hurry, so that we set off at once. Betty had not lived with us so long as Loveday, but we liked her much better. She was a Dartmoor woman, and had plenty of stories to tell about the pixies, and the little grey man who shows himself to travellers when they get lost on the moor, all told in good broad Devonshire, which strangers could scarcely understand. I remember Father himself once being puzzled when she was telling one of her stories, which concerned her own personal experience.

"I kep un theer, and vather, he turned up the scads——?"

"The what?"

"The scads, doan't ee knaw, sir? The scads—well, the vellies——"

"What on earth does the woman mean?" said Father, at his wits' end.

"Whay, the *fegs!*" cried Betty, provoked in her turn at her explanations being so ill-received, and it was not for some time that Father made out 'twas tufts of grass she meant.

Now, as we hurried along, she was full of the London coach she had seen come in.

"They'm in a tarr'ble fright up to London, I'll be bound; us may look vor the Vrench any day, dree or vower thousan' on 'em and more. And they'm to putt more men up to the heights, to see to the bikkon vires, and zo soon as ever they'm lighted, all the women and chillern and the pegs and the rest of 'em es to be car'd right off up the country. Oh, my dear, these be days, sure-ly!"

Betty's news was often a little bewildering, but when we got back and were sitting at supper, I found that 'twas quite true that the King's government had sent

down very strict orders for great watchfulness all along the coast. The French fleet had united with the Spanish, and large preparations were making along the French country, which bordered on our Channel, and Dick had seen a gentleman who told him that five hundred volunteers were to be raised by Mr. Bastard, and called upon to make every effort, and Dick himself, though still weak, was bent upon joining at once. But the town itself was in a hubbub from the hearing that there was a press-gang at work. 'Twas a new misery at that time, and one which did not reach its worst for a while, but from the very beginning its existence raised a storm of passionate indignation in the country, and no wonder. One man had been seized in Devonport that afternoon, on pretence of being able to give no account of himself, and Plymouth men, having always been a sturdy, determined set, were up in arms against the gang and the informer who had gained his ten shillings at the expense of another man's liberty. Grandfather grew so distressed and trembled so sadly at hearing what was said, that I saw Mother Molly make a little sign to Dick to change the subject. But he would not heed her. Evidently he was vexed with Molly, and I think she had been

crying. After supper, Dick buttoned up his plum-coloured riding-coat—being always somewhat of a dandy,—and went out to be sure of his news; Molly took Madge away to her little bed in our room, and to me it fell this evening to read the Psalms to grandfather in the parlour. I see him now, sitting in his great chair, stooping a little forward, as was his way, his thin hands laid on the arms of the chair, his own white hair brushed back and tied with black ribbon behind, his blue eyes, which had been startled and uneasy after the disturbing tidings, gradually regaining their calm serenity as the triumphant words of the Psalm reached his mind:—

"Kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the world; young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord, for His name only is excellent, and His praise above heaven and earth."

After I had finished I heard him saying the words over and over again to himself, and then softly: "Amen, Amen," till he began to doze in his chair. I waited, for I knew that Mother Molly would come down.

When she did she had her work in her hand, and I made her a sign that grandfather was sleeping, and

that she was to come and sit in the window-seat with me, where we could talk low with our heads close together, and no one could hear us except Polly, who, to be sure, sometimes startled us by coming out with things he must have picked up in this way. And then I began:

"Oh, Mother Molly!"

She looked at me quickly.

"What's the matter, Nan?"

"Dick has been tiresome, I know he has, and 'tis all my fault! I thought 'twas a fine thing to ask M. de Lantenac if 'twas true what was said of him, and he denied it so grandly that you should have been there to hear. But, until Mrs. Harty told me, I never thought 'twas your confidence, and how I should be making it worse for you. What did Dick say? Was he very angry?"

I am sure she was relieved at my confession. I daresay she had been dreading more indiscretions in the future. And she would have it that now little harm had been done.

"Dick is so wrapt up in his friend that of course it vexed him that such a thing should have entered my mind. He will not be angry long."

As she spoke, my eyes fell upon the delicate lace she was sewing on a cravat. 'Twas some of mother's best Mechlin, which by rights had fallen to Molly's share, and I could not bear to think that she was giving it away. But when I began to speak she stopped me at once.

"Hush, Nan," she said. "You don't know what Dick is to me, or how glad I am when I can do something for him. There are not many brothers like him in Plymouth," and she held up her head proudly.

"More Dicks than Mother Mollys," I thought, but did not say it because 'twould have vexed her so.

"Everyone is taken up with M. de Lantenac," she went on, by way of further excuse.

"And you need think no more of his being a spy," I said with some triumph. "'Tis impossible after what he said. The poor man was sadly cut down, but he believes you do not yourself mistrust him, and that is one good thing."

"Does he?" she said drily. And I saw her stitches flying.

"You don't, Moll, do you?"

"How should I," she said with a laugh, "when it seems that scarce a soul in Plymouth would be on my

side? Let us talk no more about him. Listen! is that Dick's step?"

But 'twas not, and he did not come back till she had time to grow uneasy. The dusk crept on, sweet and fragrant, though we were in a town. Molly would not have me fetch the candles for fear of waking grandfather; she sat in the little bow-window with the beautiful lace lying in her lap, and her head thrown back against the shutter. Stars began to glimmer over-head, a bat flitted past the window—we heard drums and fifes in the distance.

"Molly," I said at last suddenly, "was Mrs. Copplestone here to-day?"

"Yes, dear; this morning."

What was there in her voice that it should sound odd, and why should such a bright colour flush her face? I could see it, dusk though it was, and could not make it out.

"And have they not heard of George?"

"Oh, yes, excellent accounts. He writes so proudly of Father and the 'Invincible.'"

"To think you never told us!" I said reproachfully. And indeed I did think it strange, for George Copplestone had been like one of us always, and lately to his

great delight had got appointed to Father's ship. I had felt as if 'twere next best to being there myself. Molly did not seem to have a word to say for herself, and grandfather woke up, and would have us sing Dr. Ken's Evening Hymn. Then he gave us his blessing and went to bed.

How little we thought what would have happened before but three or four days had passed!

CHAPTER IV.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH OF KING CHARLES THE MARTYR.

PLYMOUTH has two churches—St. Andrew's, and that of King Charles the Martyr,—and 'twas this last we attended. A large party we were when we set forth on the following Sunday; grandfather leaning on Molly's arm—he in his great three-cornered hat, his careful dress of black, the buckles on his shoes; she, sweet and fresh-looking in a simple flowered gown, with a muslin kerchief knotted across it, and her brown hair escaping from under her broad hat. Dick was on the other side, cravat and all; behind came Harry and I, and then Loveday leading Madge. Whether it were the Mechlin lace or not, I think Dick

had forgiven Molly, and she was smiling brightly, looking at him with a sweet softness in her eyes.

People were going and coming up and down the dirty steep streets, and one could see by their faces that news of one sort or another was abroad. 'Twas graver indeed than we children could understand, for the French, their attack on Jersey having failed, might be expected to make a descent upon the English coast before long, though where was only a matter of conjecture; but Plymouth and Portsmouth were points of so great importance that 'twas natural to suppose they might be the objects of attack, and the worst of it was that they were actually unprepared for resistance. But from the words that were let drop by several persons as we passed them, we gathered there was more excitement in the town from the knowledge that a press-gang was at work in Devonport and round, than from any fear of the French, and, indeed, in more than one place we could see for ourselves that bills setting forth what were the royal commands to magistrates and other officers for impressing all who could give no satisfactory account of themselves, had been stripped from the walls, or bespattered with mud. It made my heart burn to see it, and I felt as if I

should have liked to have flung something at them myself. For there were dreadful tales abroad as to the cruelties of these press-gangs.

The Church was largely filled, and we found the reason was because 'twas expected Mr. Bedford would have said something in his sermon as to the events of the time, and what might be expected from ourselves in Plymouth. And I think there was scarce one present but had a pleasant feeling that the whole of the rest of the country, London itself, with king, queen, and parliament included, looked to Plymouth to do something fine when occasion came, and that we all held our heads an inch higher in consequence. But as to what it should be there were as many minds as people.

'Twas the fourth of July, and very hot in Church, what with the season and the crowd, and the boys of the Red School were always dropping off to sleep, and being awakened by a rap on the head from the beadle's wand. Poor Mr. Bedford looked quite exhausted, but luckily for him, both here and at St. Andrew's the parish clerk was in deacon's orders, so that there was no need for him to take all the service by himself. And though it grew hotter and hotter, and there were

drowsy flies buzzing about, and all the baize which lined our pew felt dreadfully rough when we touched it, and the smell of boys' love and peppermint scarce made the air cooler, yet when they had hung out the slate with the number of the Psalm, over the front of the gallery close by the royal arms, and the flute and bassoon had trembled on to the tune with a good deal of hard blowing and cost of breath, and we found that 'twas the fine old Ninth Psalm we were to sing, sing it we did, nay, almost shouted it, with thoughts of the French where, it may be, David had his head full of the Philistines, and with no more trouble about the heat.

Mr. Bedford preached his hour's sermon, but said nothing about the state of affairs beyond speaking a little of the scarcity of corn and the distress among the poor, which, said he, should excite the tenderest emotions of sympathy and compassion in the bosoms of those more bountifully supplied. Harry looked at me, and his doing so made me as red as a peony, for we had both grumbled because Mother Molly had given us few puddings of late, and I felt as if the parson had known it all. (Matters grew much worse afterwards, for corn became so dear that orders were

issued forbidding the making of pies or pastry; and in some parts of England fearful stories were told of the poor folk being forced to grind the bark of trees and mix it with their flour: and in Plymouth itself the people were so enraged with old Hutchings, the baker, who sat near us that very day in church with his wig a little awry, that they threatened to hang him from the top of the Church-tower itself. But neither Hutchings nor we thought of such deeds on this day while Mr. Bedford was preaching.) Little Madge had fallen asleep in Mother Molly's lap; I can see now the pretty picture they made together, Molly looking as cool and fresh as a rose, when everyone else seemed to me hot and tumbled, and the baby's hair like a golden glory round her face.

It was a great congregation which had to leave the Church, but they tramped out pretty quickly, having thoughts of the fresher air outside; and we waited a little to give time to let the greater part get by, grandfather always showing a shrinking fear of a crowd. 'Twas impossible but that there should be some shuffling and noise of feet, and that was all we heard for a while until we got close to the west door, and then 'twas evident some great disturbance was going on

outside. There was a shout which sounded like a yell, and some of the people pressed back and some forward, so that 'twas all we could do not to be jammed between them, and no doubt whatever remained in our minds but that the French had landed, and were waiting outside ready to fall upon us. But it seemed afterwards that Loveday's fears were all of Paul Jones the pirate.

Perhaps 'twas not surprising that Dick had no thoughts of us, but only to learn what was going on. He pushed forward, and managed to make a way for himself, helped by others who were of the same mind. And, indeed, those that pushed out were a stronger force than those which surged back, and we found ourselves driven whether we would or no. Molly had caught Madge up in her arms, fearing the little creature would be pressed to death, and Harry and I did what we could to save grandfather. But 'twas a terrible moment, what with the uncertainty, and the suddenness, and the squeezing, and the fear of Dick being in the midst of it.

There was a fat respectable-looking woman close to me, panting for breath, and I managed to ask her whether 'twas indeed the French. Before she could

answer I heard men shouting for the mayor, and then a voice called out he was at St. Andrew's, and then a great pressure behind forced us quite out to the porch, and I felt the moment was come of which I had boasted so grandly to Mrs. Harty, and that I must think of Father and do my best.

Just at that time the cries and yells broke out afresh, and there was a fresh rush from the Church, and something that was screamed close by us told us that 'twas no French, but the press-gang at work. It seemed afterwards that they had information of a merchant-sailor being in the Church, and this was too great a prize not to be tried for; and such an open and unexpected attack being quite unlooked for, and they themselves keeping quiet in a house close by until the man passed by the door, and being strongly armed with cutlasses, and getting the man quickly into the house and out into a back lane, they quite took the people by surprise. But I shall never forget the rage and violence of the mob, or the sudden change from the peaceful quiet of the Church. There were women shaking their fists and catching up handfuls of stones to fling, and men with pale compressed faces and a look in them which I have never seen since. We clung together,

terrified lest we should be separated. Mr. Bedford, in his gown, forced his way out close by us, and would have got some of the women back into the Church, but 'twas impossible. There was no actual fighting going on, for the gang had done their work with a swift rush, barricaded the door, and made off; but the fury of the people was turned against the house. It was really empty, and the stones they flung could do little harm against it, still there was something frightful in the rage with which it seemed as if they would have pulled it down; and do what we would, we were forced nearer to the heart of the tumult, and grandfather, in his distress and grief, not rightly comprehending the cause of it all, kept struggling to speak to the people. There was a moment when 'twas all open behind us, and we could have got him away, but he would not come; he shook his head, and put back Molly's hand from his arm, and tried gently to press between those in front. Molly's eyes sought mine, full of anguish.

"Can you see Dick anywhere?" she asked, breathlessly. "If he were only here!"

For with little Madge clinging to her, terrified and crying, she could do nothing. Harry stuck to grandfather like a man, and we both did what we could to

keep the pressure off him, but 'twas so little, and already his hat had been knocked off, and yet he would stretch out his arms and speak to the people to quiet them. Alas, poor grandfather, as well might he have talked to the sea! They would not have hurt him willingly, but he was in the midst of a whirl of angry passions, and one or two men swore at us for being in the way, and Molly got pushed off; and there were stones flying, and some that were flung with force against the house, rebounded, and how it was no one of us ever rightly knew, so frightful was the confusion, but a great stone struck grandfather on the forehead, and he sank down between us with the blood streaming from the cut.

What his words could not do, this did at once; it sobered the people directly. But, oh, the agony of that moment! I remember that I screamed for Molly, and that those who had been pushing us the most angrily but a minute before, made way for her, and stood round with a sudden change to pity in their faces. One woman stretched out her hands to take Madge, but the little one would not go, and stood by our sides, clinging to my frock, with her eyes fixed fearfully on poor grandfather. Molly, pale as death,

had knelt down and was stanching the blood as best she could with her handkerchief and mine, but we all felt helpless and longed for Dick. Where he could be we could not think; we found afterwards he had rushed round with a party which had gone off to try to intercept the press-gang in a back lane, and attempt a rescue. A young lad with the stones in his hand he had been just about to throw, stepped forward and offered to run to the apothecary, and glad enough we were, for 'twas terrible to see dear grandfather lying all unconscious, with the blood oozing slowly from the wound. Just at this moment someone came quickly through the crowd, which fell back on either side, and my heart leapt into my mouth for joy at seeing that 'twas M. de Lantenac.

CHAPTER V.

A REBUFF.

IT seemed as if M. de Lantenac brought us the help of a dozen people, he was so prompt and full of kindly thought. He had noted a hackney coach at no great distance, and sent off a willing messenger at once, and another for some water with which to wash the wound. And he cheered us all by telling us he was sure 'twas no more than a swoon. Mr. Bedford came back, too, at this moment, mightily shocked at finding what had happened, and with more suggestions than Molly could rightly follow in her bewilderment. He wanted to hear how it had all happened, and to have someone put into the Bridewell, and that grandfather should be taken back to the Church or to the parson-

age; and I could not but admire how M. de Lantenac staved off the answering from poor Molly, and yet never let Mr. Bedford suppose his kindness was not gratefully acknowledged. The apothecary and the coach arrived at almost the same instant, and the former had bound up the wound and administered something, which, to our great joy, caused grandfather to open his eyes and raise himself up, when Dick, having thought of us all, though a little late, came rushing back, and met this sorry sight. He turned pale.

"I never dreamed of this!" he cried. "How could I have left them!"

"How, indeed!" said M. de Lantenac, and I noticed that he turned his back upon him quite coldly.

Between them all they lifted grandfather into the coach, though the exertion made him swoon again, and Molly and the apothecary got in with him. Mr. Bedford again pressed them to go to the parsonage, where he said his sister Bassett would do anything in the world for her favourite, Miss Bligh, but 'twas much better he should be taken home, and we all followed as quickly as we could, Dick carrying Madge

and doing his best to soothe her terror. Until Harry cried out, "Where's Loveday?" we had forgotten all about her, and then there was no use in seeking. The truth was, that getting separated from us in the crowd, she fell upon some acquaintances, who got her out, and then, only thinking of her own safety, she ran all the way home as fast as she could, to Betty's great indignation. Betty herself started off at once, and met the coach coming slowly along.

As for Dick, he was very much vexed with himself for having left us; and especially, I think, when he saw how grave M. de Lantenac looked upon it. He murmured something that Molly always took care of the little ones, but M. de Lantenac interrupted him with—

"And who was to take care of your sister? You think too little of her; I do not believe you know her value at all. I know that I should act in a manner very different indeed, if I had so beautiful a sister."

"Beautiful!" cried Dick, amazed. And I really believe he did not know it. But that did not prevent him from feeling ashamed, or from speaking out with spirit: "You are quite right, sir, I should not have

left them; and another time I hope to do my duty better."

And he never heeded, though Madge was weeping freely upon the collar of his coat. So I gave her my handkerchief, and felt very kindly towards Dick.

We were at the house almost as soon as the coach, which had come at a slow pace. With Betty's help they had got grandfather out, and placed him in the parlour to rest for awhile before moving him to his room; and the cordial Mr. Tregellas had given him, had brought him round better than we could have hoped. But 'twas a terrible shake for a man of his age and weakness; and there was no knowing how it would go. M. de Lantenac had asked leave to come in, and who could have denied it? He went upstairs with Dick and Harry and Madge; and I was sometimes in one place and sometimes in the other, for Molly would hardly let anyone do for grandfather but herself; and those upstairs were wanting to hear every minute.

M. de Lantenac thought of everything. He wished to run for a physician, but we all knew and trusted Mr. Tregellas; and then he would go and get some

brandy, of which there was none in the house; and he could tell them of such an easy way of carrying one who was hurt, that grandfather was taken to his room without any of the shaking they dreaded. In fact, no one could have helped us better or more quietly.

The morning had passed so strangely, that our dinner-hour had long gone by, and no one had thought of it. But when the apothecary had left, and Mother Molly was settled by grandfather's side, she sent me to ask Loveday to take it in for us, Betty being so much occupied. Loveday consented with great unwillingness, feeling herself greatly aggrieved by Molly's employing Betty, and that no one would listen to her account of her own heroic acts when she was in the crowd. But, indeed, we found it hard to believe them.

When she had at last set to work, grumbling, and throwing the things about with a clatter, I went back to Molly. She had left Betty with grandfather, who seemed to be dozing, and had slipped into her own room, where she was standing folding up the muslin kerchief she had just taken off, and smoothing it. Her face was still pale, but she was more like our Molly.

"See that poor Dick gets what he wants, won't you, Nan?"

I promised readily, thinking of Dick's speech. Then I said:—

"M. de Lantenac is in there. Will he stay to dinner?"

She turned quickly round, and said as hastily, "No, indeed!" But I suppose my face showed something, for she looked both vexed and bewildered, and said, "Must we ask him, Nan? Don't you think he will go away of himself?"

I could not say that he showed any signs of going. And I wondered that Moll, who was always kind, should have such inhospitable thoughts about one who had done so much for us that day. Why should he not stay? I could think of no other reason but that, perhaps, Mother Molly thought there was not enough dinner for him; and I knew that was not the case, for I had seen the piece of beef. She was looking at me as if she did not see me, with a troubled perplexity in her eyes; and the perplexity did not end in a smile, as was often the case. But she said at last, almost as unwillingly as Loveday could have done:—

"Well, if he must, he must. And you will see that he has what he wants."

"You are coming in, Molly?"

"No, indeed. I shall stay with grandfather; and Betty shall bring me my dinner. 'Tis you must be Mother Nan this time."

She was smiling now and smoothing my hair into order. But I was dumb-foundered. A dinner without Molly, and a strange gentleman to be entertained! And I could not but think she might have come if she would.

M. de Lantenac was disappointed too—that I could see. He kept looking at the door, and then frowning when only Loveday came in. And I am sure 'twas the most uncomfortable dinner that I ever ate, for it seemed as if everything went wrong. Another time I should never have noticed it, but now 'twas all on my shoulders; and when there was no mustard, and Dick looked reproachfully at me and the mustard-pot, I thought I should have cried. Loveday banged about in order to let us see what she had suffered on account of Paul Jones; and kept me in a fever, though I believe M. de Lantenac's presence really pleased her very much; and that she would not have gone further than

this expression of her feelings. And when the stewed raspberries came, and I had helped them all round with a tremulous fear of drops from the spoon on the clean table-cloth, what does Harry do but upset his plate, and there was a pink stream meandering down to the ground! I did feel he might have chosen some other day, when 'twould not have mattered. Afterwards, when we were upstairs again, I could hear Polly down in the parlour asking all sorts of qnestions: "What's it all about? Where's Mother Molly? Oh dear, dear, dear, those children will be the death of me!" and I thought I should have liked to have said the same for myself.

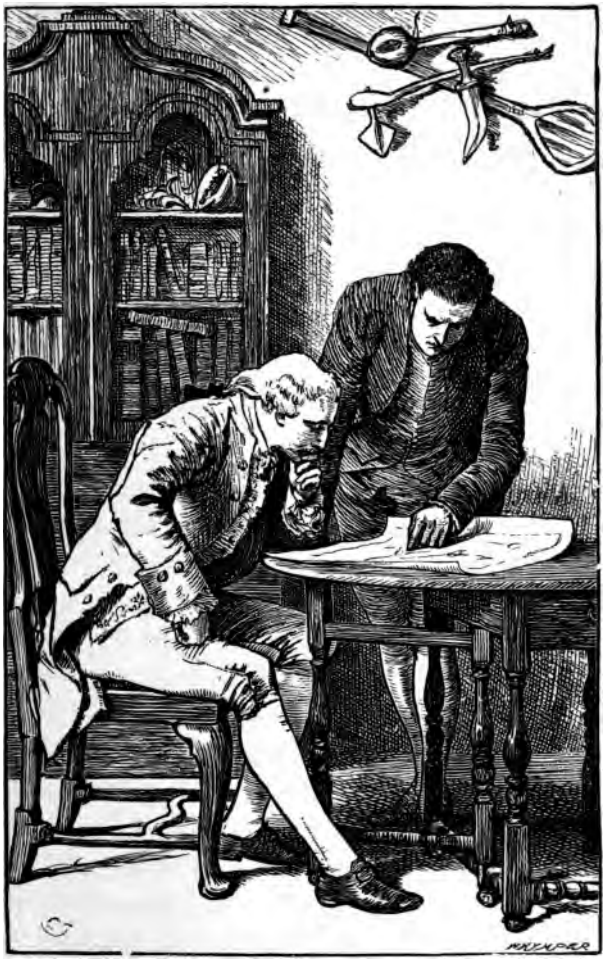
Dick, when he had got to feel a little less remorseful about grandfather, was full of delight at having his friend at his house; and wanting to show him everything. Father had brought home curiosities from all parts of the world: carved paddles, and sharks' jaws, and back-scratchers, and the weapons of some of those savage islanders in the Pacific of whom so much was talked just then on account of Captain Cook's travels; and boxes full of beautiful shells. It was always a great delight to Madge to see these shells, and to hold them close to her little pink ear, to hear the sea music;

and I was glad they should be brought out that day. But it was soon evident that M. de Lantenac, though he was civilly pleased to glance at them, took no great interest in our stores, and was better satisfied to look into what books there were on the shelves. Among them were some of father's navigation volumes, and two or three old plans, among which he found one which showed what the citadel was like when 'twas first built after the Restoration. This pleased him mightily. He spread it before him on our round table, and would have Dick go into the matter and point out exactly what differences lay between then and now—and when I left the room, longing to see grandfather, the two had their mouths full of bastions, and parallels, and glacis, and I know not what besides.

Molly asked me how they were amusing themselves, and I told her. She took a step or two towards the door, and then came back. Grandfather was lying quietly, but so white that it went to my heart to see him; and there was the bandage across his head, and the smell of vinegar in the room. I caught at Mother Molly's arm—

"Are you sure he is better?"

"Nay, I hope so. 'Tis all in GOD'S hands, Nan;



"BASTIONS, AND PARALLELS, AND GLACIS."

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"Let me stay here," I begged, hanging back. For I longed to be helpful and watch grandfather.

She would not let me, which I thought strange. She set Betty by his bedside, and took my hand and went in where the others were. M. de Lantenac sprang up as he saw her; and his eyes kindled with a sort of triumph, as if this were the moment for which he had been waiting. As for Molly, she curtsied in answer to his low bow, and then stood with a little air of stateliness which was altogether new to her. Her eye fell upon the maps and plans, which were spread out before them on the table.

"Are you studying our defences, Dick?" she asked, rather pointedly.

"I am showing M. de Lantenac how different 'tis from old times," he answered. "But there's one point we can't make out—the manner in which the battery at A. is placed so as to command the harbour. Sure it must do so. Well, I can learn without much difficulty."

"Nay, my friend," said M. de Lantenac, laying his hand on Dick's arm, but looking at Mother Molly and smiling, "better not. We know that there are ill reports abroad about me, and your sister here, for all

her amiable goodness, has not yet quite settled it in her heart whether or no I may not be one spy."

Dick would have burst out at this as he had done before, but that Molly checked him with some dignity.

"I should be very sorry to call you by so hard a name, but I need not point out to you, sir, that your being the countryman of those with whom we are unfortunately at war, must expose you to the charge of being indifferent to your country, or desirous to turn your stay here to some account. And this being so, you must forgive me for thinking that in conversation 'twere better to avoid whatever bears upon any subject which might be misinterpreted."

Molly had flushed red while she spoke, and I think her words, and the way in which she said them, astonished us all. As for Dick, he stared open-mouthed. M. de Lantenac grew pale, and bowed again with his hand on his heart.

"You are right, madam," he said in a low voice.

Molly's heart was very generous and trusting, and I am sure it pained her most keenly to feel compelled to say what she had said. But she remained standing, so that M. de Lantenac might see she meant him to take his leave.

"At least, madam," he said in the same tone, "you do not forbid me to call and inquire for your good grandfather?"

"We do not receive visits from gentlemen," said Molly gravely. And then I think her heart smote her beyond bearing, for she put out her hand, and said with a bright sweet smile, "You must not think me ungrateful, sir, for I am not, and I shall never forget what you have done for us to-day."

He kissed her hand, and went away silently.

Then Dick began to cry out, but Molly, all her dignity gone, went and flung her arms round his neck, and said, imploringly:

"Dick, dear Dick, don't be angry. We are motherless children, and I must think for myself. Don't you see that if he comes here, people will be talking? You would not like them to talk about *me*?"

He turned away and muttered something about girls' vanity; and perhaps that put him into a good humour again, or perhaps he thought of grandfather, for he did not go on more.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER FRIEND.

"She was sharper than an eastern wind."—TENNYSON.

GRANDFATHER passed a quiet night, and Mr. Tregellas was satisfied with him the next day; but yet he told us 'twould be long before we could feel the danger was past, because erysipelas might set in, and that would be a most serious thing. And the riot had made a great impression on his mind, so that every now and then he would awake with a start and stretch out his hands, as if imploring the tumult to cease. People were very good to us. Mr. Bedford came early the next day, and Mrs. Bassett drove over in her coach, with a dish of stiff jelly she had made with her own hands, and M. de Lantenac called at the door, and Mrs. Harty sent her own woman to know if

she might not stay to help nurse. She would have been there herself, but that she was ill and confined to her room, and she wanted some of us to go altogether to her house, that grandfather might not be disturbed more than was necessary. 'Twould have broke my heart, I think, if Molly had asked me to go, and I was dreadfully afraid she might, because 'twas always supposed I could not be in the house without slamming doors or jumping down the stairs. But she did not, nor once spoke as if she had thought of it.

It was holiday time, or else Harry would have been going to his day school, and I for three hours every morning to a lady who took pupils in that way, and Dick was always saying 'twas a pity this had stopped. But for all that, I think the house was kept pretty quiet, and I am sure Dick himself would have been in a poor plight if he had had no one to talk to, or to consult about his chances of being chosen for the corps of Fencibles.

Mrs. Copplestone sent over to enquire, but did not come herself till, I think, the third or fourth day after grandfather's accident; which seemed strange, considering how intimate the families had always been. And from something Molly said one day, I fancied she

was fretting a little over it. It was not much, but I heard someone coming up the stairs, and took it into my head 'twas Mrs. Copplestone, and Molly brightened and smiled, and said, "Is she come?" very eagerly, as if she had been looking for her. It was not she after all, but Mrs. Bassett with more jelly, and Moll's disappointment was plain. She came at last, however; Molly tied a fresh ribbon round her neck and went in, and I stayed with grandfather.

Sometimes we read to him, and sometimes he just liked to have us where he could see us, and now and then let drop a gentle word or two, very often about our Madge, whom he loved most dearly. This day he seemed more alive to outer things, and to my surprise his ear caught the sound of voices.

"Nan," he said, "is that Mrs. Harty talking? Because if 'tis so, I should like her to come in and see me."

I said "No, grandfather, 'tis Mrs. Copplestone who has called to ask after you, and Mother Molly has gone to speak to her."

He said quickly that he could not have her in; and this was not astonishing, for though I believe she was fond of us all, she had a prompt imperative manner,

and a way of pronouncing sharply upon things which always made grandfather uneasy. But after he had lain quiet for a few minutes, he told me to go in and to thank Mrs. Copplestone very kindly, on his part, for coming to ask for him, and to say he hoped her family were well, and to give his kind compliments.

I was glad of the errand, wanting to hear about George, and thinking perhaps there might be a message for me from him. For he knew how I cared to hear of Father's ship. However, when I had opened the door, all thoughts of this flew out of my head, seeing, as I did, that Molly was sitting tearful and flushed, and Mrs. Copplestone so displeased that I stared. She glanced at me and nodded, but took no other notice, and went on with her speech, which was coming forth with much vigour and sharpness.

"I never thought to have to say such things to you; and, indeed, I should not have done it if 'twere not for the thought of your mother, and of someone else you know of. 'Twould have grieved *her* almost beyond bearing to think of you, Moll, as headstrong and unmaidenly; and as for *him*, well, you know best, perhaps, what would be his grief in the matter."

I understood nothing, but I had gone round and

knelt by Mother Molly's side, and put my hands into hers, that she might feel there was someone there. And she held me tight.

"When I had spoken once," went on Mrs. Copplestone, severely, "I certainly had no fears but that 'twould have been enough. Indeed, you promised me that it *should* be enough, and I was unwilling to say over much, knowing that you are young, and therefore might have been thoughtless, and had no good friend, perhaps, to act the part of a counsellor. I might have thought that it would have been better had you sought advice more freely, but I was never one to offer it where 'twas not asked for."

This was said with a glance at Mrs. Harty, to whom she thought we turned too much. But Molly still remained silent, and she continued:—

"When at last I felt it necessary to speak I expected you would have paid some attention to what I pointed out. I tell you plainly, Molly, that a young woman who conducts herself with so little propriety cannot hope to be welcomed into any respectable family, and though I would overlook much for the sake of your mother——"

She stopped. Molly had lifted her hand.

"If my mother or my father were here, madam, I doubt whether any would have said such words to me. Sure I am that I have given no one the right to do so."

She spoke not passionately, as I should have done after such bitter words, but slowly and sadly, and 'twas evident that Mrs. Copplestone was made uncomfortable. For she was a kind-hearted woman, and, as I said, fond of us all, only liking to rule, and vexed if her advice were not closely followed. And I think, when she saw Molly's sweet and modest face, she felt ashamed to have spoken with such violence.

"Well, child, well," she said quickly, "perhaps it was more thoughtlessness than anything else; but that is a foolish fault for one who has younger ones to guide."

"I do not think it was thoughtlessness, madam," Molly replied, still quietly. "I gave it all the thought I could."

"But Molly," cried Mrs. Copplestone, losing her dignity in amazement, "Do you know what you are saying? Don't you see that 'tis shocking for you, a young girl without any woman older than yourself in the house, to be receiving a gentleman, and letting him

spend all these hours here, and dine with you—nay, for aught I know, sup?"

"That he did not!" I cried, in a heat of indignation, "if 'tis M. de Lantenac of whom you are making this ado. He came in because he had helped us so with poor grandfather, and because he was Dick's friend, and Molly did not wish it, nor would so much as dine with us. And he went away because Mother Molly asked him not to come, and 'twas scarce four o'clock."

I was too angry to be coherent, and Mrs. Copplestone was very angry also.

"Hoity-toity!" she exclaimed, "and is this the way you suffer your younger sisters to behave, Miss Molly? Pretty behaviour, indeed! firing up as if I were going to beat you!"

"You have done worse than beat me, I think, madam," said Molly. "And if I have none but younger sisters left to defend me, you must not expect me to blame them, even if they do speak too warmly."

And with that she put her arm round my neck, and drew me to her, and we clung together.

Mrs. Copplestone looked at us sharply, and got up

and went to the window. She came back with a letter in her hand, which she had taken out of her bag, and spoke in quite an altered voice.

"There is a letter come from George to-day, and a message for you in it. I will leave it for you to look at, at your leisure, Moll, if you will, and you can send Harry back with it by-and-by, and he may stop to supper."

Molly gave a quick longing look at the letter; but she did not put out her hand, rather drew back a little.

"No, madam," she said firmly; "with your opinion of me, such as it is, I could not take it, though I thank you for your kindness. I do not fear *his* misconceiving me; but you are his mother, and if you hold my conduct to have been so blameworthy—why, 'tis by that we must abide. I thank you very much, and if I may not answer this message, I leave it in your hands to explain as kindly as you can."

She must have been wounded to the very quick, for I had never heard her speak like this before, and Mrs. Copplestone was smitten with amazement.

"Why, Moll," she said, taking a step towards her, "what has come over you? Is this the way you treat your old friends? For shame, child—and George's

mother, too! Don't you know that there must be somebody to look after you and find fault, and who so fit to do it as I? Not take the letter, nor read George's message, poor fellow! Fie, fie!"

"Not if you have such thoughts of me," said Molly, with her voice tremulous.

"Pooh, child, my thoughts of you will never break your bones. Nay, then," went on Mrs. Copplestone, very gravely, "will you make me ask your pardon, and me an old woman by comparison! Don't you know yet that 'tis my way to say a little more than I mean? I never thought so badly of you as all that: only you young creatures here, without any one to look after you properly, can't be too careful, for your own sakes as well as George's."

Molly was in her arms before she had finished her words, and Mrs. Copplestone kissing her. I thought perhaps 'twas better to go back to grandfather, and leave them, and the more so because I was more likely to get a rating than a kissing from Mrs. Copplestone when my turn came, if it were only for being in the room. So I sat down and tried to disentangle a puzzle which had got into my head. What had Molly, more than the rest of us, to do with George?

CHAPTER VII.

FRIEND OR FOE?

"His ready speech flow'd fair and free."—SCOTT.

"VRENCH be coming! Vrench be coming! Ees, fay!"

It made me jump, but it was only the parrot. Harry had been teaching him to say these words in Betty's manner, and 'twas most laughable to hear how the bird had caught the turn of it. He was a very handsome grey parrot with a bright crimson tail, and Father had brought him home for me in his ship. Now, when I spoke to him, he came clambering along the side of his cage nearest to me, and took my finger very gently in his mouth. The heat was so excessive at this time that we had hung him outside the house, and having

practised a little on the spinet, for grandfather liked the sound of it, I had gone down into the garden, and Mother Molly had promised to come as well.

She had heard the bird upstairs, it seemed, for she came down laughing.

"Polly has caught the cry of the country," she said, perching herself on the window-sill, "but the worst of it is, 'tis true, by all accounts. Mr. Boscawen told Dick to-day, that we ought to get our money out of the bank and have it in guineas in the house, ready to take away. I have some canvas here, with which to make a strong bag."

"Should we go to Dartmoor?"

"Yes, to Betty's brother."

'Twas astonishing how much of my courage had oozed out since that day with the press-gang. I no longer felt as if I should like to stay and fight.

"But grandfather, Mother Moll? Grandfather can't go."

She looked grave.

"Not yet. I asked Mr. Tregellas, and he said it would be impossible for a time. I hope we may not have to fly till he is better, but if we should——"

"What?" I asked impatiently.

"Dick and I would stay, and, Nan, you must take the little ones."

"Oh, no, no!" I cried out.

"Yes, yes, indeed," said Molly playfully. "Why you would not think of yourself before our Madge?"

"No, but you!"

"Well, we'll hope our ships may yet beat them off."

"Father will be thinking of us, Molly."

She said "Yes," softly, and there was such a sweet and happy look in her eyes, that by the light of what had struck me that day, I fancied 'twas not only of Father she thought. I was a little afraid to put the question, and yet I was burning to do it, so I looked at the garden gate and blurted it out.

"Are you going to be George Copplestone's wife, Mother Molly?"

There was a little silence: I could hear the parrot whispering to himself, "Ees, fay; Ees, fay; Ees, fay!" Molly got down from the window seat, and came and sat on the grass by my side.

"Perhaps, Nan. Some day or other. Not for a long time, dear." I think when I said no more, she was afraid I was hurt, and so I was, a little, for I thought I might have known. She went on hurriedly,—

"There is nothing settled, we do not even call ourselves engaged; for George knows he must wait a great while, and 'twas thought best by everybody that nothing should be said. I did want to tell you; but when he went away, you seemed almost as much of a child as Harry: 'tis only lately, Nan, you have grown so womanly. These past few days I have longed to say something, but scarcely knew whether or no, until I had consulted Mrs. Harty. When you came into the room to-day I was sure you would understand." And then, as I still did not speak, for although I was partly prepared, it seemed to take me by surprise, she said, almost timidly, "You have always liked George, dear?"

That aroused me, and I hugged her heartily. I am sure 'twas the greatest relief to her to think that I knew it, and that there was someone to whom she could talk openly. She would not let me say all I should have liked about Mrs. Copplestone, though 'twas evident she had felt her accusation deeply. It seemed Mrs. Copplestone had spoken to her the week before about M. de Lantenac, very much vexed that he should come to the house, and Molly had always told Dick not to bring him. But Dick was so proud of his friend, and so far from thinking there could be any other in

ducement except his society, that he pooh-poohed all her entreaties.

"And was that why you did not wish Dick to be with him?"

"No, indeed," said she eagerly, "I could not have been so selfish. And that would not have mattered, only bringing him to the house. No, Nan, 'twas for the reason I gave you, and no other."

"Vrench be coming!" cried the parrot in high glee.

"Oh, Molly, 'tis impossible!" I said. But somehow I could not say it quite so confidently.

"Well," she said, sighing, "I hope so. But Dick is so unsuspecting, and he lets out everything to him, and says he is going to try and get him into the citadel. I am always in terror of what he may tell him, for Mrs. Copplestone says if 'twere only known how poorly we are furnished with defence, the French might sail right into Plymouth Sound. And now there has been this set at Admiral Keppel, and Sir Charles Hardy is an old man, and has seen no service these twenty years, and has but a few ships. Only think, Nan, what a terrible thing 'twould be for Father"—and here she just paused a second—"if one of us was the means of helping the French into Plymouth!"

Terrible! Why, I knew 'twould almost kill him.

I lay awake, I am sure, full half an hour that night, which was a long while for one of my age, and in spite of it I could think of nothing useful, only kept wishing I could be by to hear what Dick said when he walked with M. de Lantenac. And perhaps if I had made myself more pleasant to Dick he would have more readily made me his companion.

The heat of those days was something almost beyond bearing. In other parts of the country it was much worse, for in Plymouth there was generally a sea-breeze springing up towards evening, and we could get it by going up on the Hoe, but about noon-day in our house 'twas so intense as to give us great fears for grandfather. And every day the news grew more disquieting. The French were absolutely masters of the Channel, and might at any moment threaten Plymouth. The King's proclamation came down that at the first approach of the enemy, all horses, oxen, and cattle, not employed in defence, were to be driven and removed to some place of security. Then there was a talk of the prisoners of war being sent off to Exeter. And, as might be thought with all this alarm abroad—and not only at Plymouth, but round the English

coasts generally—there were constant panics terrifying the public mind. Many of them I have forgotten, and of others I cannot remember whether 'twas this particular summer or in later years, but there was always a ludicrous side to the terror. We had an aunt living in Sussex, where one day they were frightened out of their senses by hearing the beacons were all alight, and the French no doubt close at hand. 'Twas quite true about the beacons, but no one could see the French, and it turned out that the wise people in charge on one hill, wanting a fire for some purpose, had lit a small one by the side of the beacon, and never thought they were giving the signal! And there is a better story still against the good folk at Milford Haven, who seeing, as they thought, through the gloom of night, a strange ship standing close in, banged away at it with a valiant heart all the night long, and in the morning found the enemy was none other than their old rock which stood outside the harbour, and must have been sore surprised at such ill-treatment from his friends.

However, there is no doubt that at this time, with so many against her, with no allies, and with her navy and ports very ill-prepared, England was in the

greatest danger. And though we children could not understand this, and were ready to believe the "Invincible" alone—with Father and George Copplestone on board—was sufficient to protect her, yet even I perceived 'twas better Dick should talk on any subject rather than our weak defences to the best Frenchman that ever breathed.

We did not see much of Dick. He spent a great deal of his time with M. de Lantenac. But one evening Molly got him to go up to the Hoe with her and me, for since Mrs. Copplestone's fault-finding she would not go there without him, and the heat and confinement to the house, and anxiety, had taken away her pretty pink colour, so that Mrs. Harty was quite uneasy about her, and, I think, gave Dick a hint.

'Twas more beautiful that evening than words can say. A thin opal-tinted haze lay all along upon the glassy water, so that the line of horizon was lost, and no one could tell which was sky and which sea. A sloop, which had been hastily armed with guns, was moving slowly out of the Sound, her white sails reflected in long lines in the water, and two or three fishing-boats, with sails the same colour as the red sandstone of our Devonshire cliffs, were coming in.

Dick wanted to go down and hear whether they had brought news of the French, for 'twas by such means we often got our tidings, but Molly would not let him.

"You shall go later, if you must," she said smiling, "but now I have you I shall keep you. Sure, Dick, 'tis too charming here for you to wish to leave, and listen, there is the band in the distance."

They were playing their finishing tune, "God save great George, our King," an air which ever went straight to our hearts; and I think there was not one of us but repeated the words to ourselves, as we looked round at the fair and beautiful scene. Presently Dick said,

"I went to Andrews' to-day, Molly."

"About the waggon?"

"Yes. I found they were being bespoke so rapidly that if we did not look out we should be left in the lurch. But now I have got him to promise a good-sized one, and two stout horses."

"That is off my mind, then," Mother Molly said, with a sigh of relief; "I only pray we may be able to take grandfather, for a sudden fright might kill him; and yet, Dick, 'twill be dreadful to leave you behind with the Volunteers!"

I thought 'twas best to hold my tongue and not

throw difficulties, but I made up my mind that it would be a great deal more dreadful for me to go and leave them both. Meanwhile it was difficult to realize that we might have to fly, for of all peaceful evenings this looked the most peaceful. The calm and hush deepened as the evening stole on, and all the lovely colours seemed to melt gravely into one another and die away. Lights began to twinkle on Drake's Island, and on board some little vessels moored just within its shelter; a dreamy plash of oars reached us; presently we could hear that someone was landing under the rocks at the top of which we stood. There is a little path leading up from the beach, and after a while we saw a man come up. He passed us, and then came back and took off his hat, and we found 'twas M. de Lantenac.

Molly's face I could not see, but I could hear by her voice she was not over pleased. As for Dick, he was loud in his greetings, and wanting to know where the Count had come from.

"From getting cool, my friend," he said pleasantly. "Having been stifled all day, I called a boat and went out this evening, little thinking my fortune would prove so good to me on my return. You, madam, have come to add to the perfection of the hour."

Dick spoke a little hastily. ('Twas curious, but I think that although Dick was quite content to receive M. de Lantenac's compliments himself, he mistrusted them when they were bestowed upon other people, and I was conscious of something of the same contradiction in myself.)

"Have you heard any tidings, sir, from the fishing-boats?"

"No more than the same sort of vague reports as have been flying about the week past. In time of war, without doubt, it is always the same. Oh, my people will not come. I know them too well. I hope that you do not suffer yourself, madam, to be disquieted?"

"One must always be disquieted by uncertainty, I suppose," said Molly gravely. "And it is possible we may be put to inconvenience. But I do not *fear*, sir, if that is your meaning."

He looked towards her curiously.

"You are different from others of your sex, are you not then, madam?" he said; "but that is no more than I should have expected. And perhaps you have information beyond what is generally guessed at as to the condition of the defences?"

"No, sir," replied Molly with spirit, "that is a

matter I leave to others who can understand it better. But as to fear, standing where we stand, and remembering the men who played their part here at a time when England was in worse plight than she is now, I hope 'tis not presumptuous in me to believe that the men of Devon will show they have got the same blood in their veins, and are not more backward in driving off the invaders. We wish you good-night, sir. Come, Nan."

There was a ring in Mother Molly's voice as she said this, which made her words, though she spoke them low, sound like a trumpet. M. de Lantenac stood where we left him, without trying to answer; and when we had gone a little way, and I looked back over my shoulder, I saw him still standing motionless on the ridge of the hill, a dark shadow sharply cut against the clear blueness of the evening sky.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN M. DE LANTENAC'S HANDS.

"Oh, thy letter, thy letter; he's a good friend of mine,
Stand aside, good bearer."—LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.

THE month wore on without much change beyond the deepening of alarm on all sides, and the departure of one or two families to Exeter and elsewhere: among them, of one old man whose age, they said, was much beyond a hundred. Grandfather was so far restored, that he was able to sit in his own place downstairs, and even to go for a drive in the coach which Mr. Radcliffe, of Warleigh, sent him for the purpose. This was a great relief to my mind, for it had seemed a most dreadful thing to me that I should be sent away, and grandfather and Mother Molly left behind. But now it looked as if we should go together,

except poor Dick. And Mrs. Harty also lay heavy on our thoughts, for she would always say that the journey would be far worse to her than the French; and the most that Mother Molly could make her promise was, that if it came to extremities, she would drive away to Warleigh.

Those that have not felt it can scarce tell what a strange feeling it gives to look round and think that, in a few days, the house you are living in may be burnt and pillaged, and to be expecting, at any moment of the day or night, to be roused by news of the enemy. And yet, what is stranger still is how quickly you get used to this state of alarm, and how little it disturbs you. Some of our neighbours said they should not fly till the French were quite in, and masters of the harbour; but Mother Molly made up her mind not to leave it so long, but to go directly they appeared in sight, because any violent haste or panic might be too great a shock for grandfather, so Mr. Tregellas told her. The great hope of all the townspeople lay in the French thinking Plymouth better prepared for defence than was the case. Whether the King's government did not believe that the French really intended to attack, or what, 'tis impossible to say, but they made

no preparations all this time, and I believe there were scarce two rounds of ammunition in the citadel, and perhaps less.

Very unfortunately, Mrs. Copplestone fell foul of Dick on the subject of M. de Lantenac. She had known him, of course, like the rest of us, all his life, and could not think of him as he thought of himself, with the weight of nineteen years upon him. So she spoke to him sharply about his folly in fancying that a man so much older as the Count should care for his society, except as a means of furthering his own ends; and this set Dick in a fume of indignation. He came home to us, and gave Mrs. Copplestone all the hard names he could think of, vowing he would never go to her house again, and I know not what; and all that Molly could say was of no avail in calming the storm. There was no one in Plymouth like M. de Lantenac, he declared, and he would trust him as a brother; and England had no better friend. This must be said for Dick, that I don't think there was another person in Plymouth shared Mrs. Copplestone's and Molly's opinions; 'twas really strange to see how complete a confidence M. de Lantenac had won. He often said himself he should not rest until he got himself natura-

lized as a British subject. Then Dick had been forced to see his feelings about Mother Molly, and that made him believe that 'twas only jealousy on the part of George Copplestone's mother.

Molly was very uneasy, more so than I knew, though she talked to me openly, and said 'twas her greatest comfort.

By this time it had got well into August, and Harry and I to the end of our holidays. One afternoon Madge and I went to Mrs. Harty's again, and as I had some pages of Lowther's Grammar to learn by heart, much against my will, Molly said I should take it and learn it there, while Mrs. Harty read, and Madge stayed with Mrs. Smith. And I remember that day, before we started, going into the kitchen, where Betty was busy with hatchet and hammer cleaving the great loaves of white sugar, and I fell upon the nippers with which to crack the smaller pieces. Loveday was upstairs, and Betty confided to me that she was packing her clothes.

"Her'll be off the first, I'll be bound. Her've no more villin' than they nippers. That day you was arl dringed up in the choorch, her never thought nothin' 'bout Passun Ridley nor nobody but herself. I should

be stunned to be so self-seekin'. Night an' day her'm talking 'bout her old itemy things."

It was evident we should not have much help from Loveday.

The heat had passed, and the weather was too damp and stormy for Mrs. Harty to be sitting in her garden. She sat at her window instead, where 'twas very cheery, and where she could overlook her pleasant garden as she read or knitted. She had had Mr. Cookworthy there that morning, bringing her a little piece of his beautiful china, which stood on a small table by her side, and she showed it to me with a smile.

"Not very wise, Nan, is it, to gather more together, when all runs a chance of being carried off by our enemies? But I have set my heart upon saving this, and some others like it, to be my wedding present to Mother Molly."

This seemed to bring it so near that I could only stare in wonder, and Mrs. Harty fairly laughed.

"Don't you expect to have the wedding some day?"

"Not for a long while," I said indignantly. "Molly said so."

"Do you know why, Nan?"

"Because George is away."

"He will not be always away, let us hope. No, my dear, 'tis because she *is* Mother Molly, and she knows you can't spare her. So the sooner you can fit yourself for filling her place, the more you will be furthering her happiness. Now do you learn your grammar lesson, and I'll take a book, and when you have finished we'll have a pleasant chat."

'Twas settled that Madge and I should stay to supper, and be sent back with James; but at a little after seven, Harry arrived, quite breathless, to say that Molly wanted me at once. And he made so many faces and signs at me behind Mrs. Harty's back, that I got quite bewildered, and I am sure she saw there was something. But she said nothing, only wrapped my cloak round, and kissed me tenderly. And she would still keep Madge, who was nothing loth, having come upon some knowledge of a junket and scalded cream in the pantry.

"What's the matter?" I said, catching Harry's arm as soon as we got outside the gate.

"Wait and hear from Mother Molly," he said stolidly.

"No, now. I can't wait. Do tell me, dear Harry."

He liked so dearly to tease, that I don't believe he

would have told me if he had not been burning to speak. And even now he made me guess first.

I guessed grandfather wrongly, and Polly wrongly, and then I guessed Dick, and he nodded hard.

"Is he ill again?" I asked, but all the while I knew that was not it.

"Ill? No. Sure, girls *are* sillies!"

"Then it is M. de Lantenac," I said, and he nodded again. I caught his arm and shook him. "Harry, do speak! What is it?"

He saw that I was past waiting, and kept back no longer. So far as I could make out, what had happened was this: Dick had come home a little while ago full of triumph. He had been over the citadel with a gentleman who understood all the defence-works most thoroughly, and had shown him as they went how they would be brought to bear. And Dick was so pleased to have the means of confirming certain points and explaining others which he had discussed before with M. de Lantenac, that on his way home he went to the merchant's house where he was lodging, to talk it over with him, but he was out. Molly had got all white, as Harry described it, while she listened, but when she heard this she clasped her hands and said,

then he had not seen him? No, Dick said, but he had gone in and written him a note, and left it there. It seemed that this information cast her down terribly, and she besought Dick to go and get his note again, and think of what he might be doing. He only laughed and patted her cheek, and said she and Mrs. Copplestone were the two silliest women in all Plymouth. And she need not mind the French knowing about the batteries, for there was scarcely any shot in the place to fire from them. "And you told him this, too!" cried Molly, with a sort of groan. Dick answered proudly that she might have heard him say many times that he trusted M. de Lantenac as he would trust his brother, and then he went out of the house, and Mother Molly sent Harry for me, and that was all he knew.

It did not take long to get to the house, and Molly was at the garden-gate watching. I had never seen her look as she did then, her face having no colour left in it. She came flying out when she saw us coming, and caught me by the arm.

"I thought you would never be here," she cried. "Nan, for pity's sake, think of something! It seems to me, whichever way I turn, my hands are tied."

"Oh, Molly," I said, "why should you think so evil of M. de Lantenac?"

"I am certain, certain," she said impatiently. "I can't talk of all that now. Think of what this will be for Father. And there it is in Dick's own handwriting, worse even than if he had but told him. If it had been any but M. de Lantenac, I would have gone to him and besought him for that letter on my knees."

Molly was like one distraught; and seeing this, made me think much worse of it than I had done when Harry told me. I felt that we must do something. Dick had not come back, it seemed, and no one knew where he was; but as he had written the note and left it, we did not think he could have meant to go back there.

"If I had asked him more quietly, he might have given way," said Molly sadly. "I thought of running to Mr. Bedford's or to Mr. Buller's; but that would show all, and perhaps be no use."

"Harry and I will go and try to get back the letter," I said. "Now, Moll, you must not say nay."

She shook her head.

"He will not give it to you."

"Perhaps he has not got it yet. Come, Harry."

Mother Molly wrung her hands.

"I cannot bear to send you where I dare not go myself. If I took you or Harry——"

But she was thinking of Mrs. Copplestone, as I knew. And grandfather was standing at the window, and calling "Molly, Molly!" piteously, and she looked at me with her eyes full of uncertain trouble.

"What harm can come to us? Now, Harry, let us run."

But she made me stop while she ran in and brought down her own cloak and hood, for I was nearly as tall as she, and tied it on me and kissed me very warmly.

"'Tis for Father and poor Dick," she said, under her breath.

"And Plymouth town and all of us," I said laughing. "Don't frighten yourself, Molly, if we are late; and don't tell Dick, or he will spoil it all."

Harry was never a boy of many words, and as we had a good way to go to Mr. Newman's house, where M. de Lantenac lodged, we kept our breath for our running. 'Twas no grievance to me, for I liked the fun and excitement of being out at that time and on such an errand, and as I could not lose my admiration for M. de Lantenac all at once, I made no doubt of being able to induce him to give me up Dick's letter. Harry

did not think so. When I expressed my hopes, he said gruffly that if 'twas any use to him he didn't see why he should give it up because a girl came and asked for it, and as this was a sort of argument in which 'twas difficult to bring out one's own convictions plainly, I was obliged to hold my peace.

We were forced to go up and down a number of dirty streets, crowded with people, and 'twas a squally evening, with a fine rain coming now and then in what we call a scat, just driving up suddenly and passing away with the wind before it has done much worse than sprinkle, but leaving a promise of more behind. Mr. Newman's house stood in the street, an old Elizabethan building, with gables and broad casements. On the door he had placed a new knocker, which I tried boldly, but which was stiff and made such a feeble sound that Harry laughed at me finely. However, it brought a young women, who stared and said that the French gentleman was not in the house. We knew Mr. and Mrs. Newman, so I asked if they were in, and whether we might wait, as we had business with M. de Lantenac. She said, after a little hesitation, that we might wait if we pleased, but that Mr. and Mrs. Newman had gone away for two nights,

and showed us into a small room by the door, which looked as if it were a sort of place Mr. Newman used when people came to him on business, and had pictures of some of his ships hung round, and a print of Mr. Smeaton's lighthouse.

I got more frightened there than I had been in the streets, and Harry was most impatient. He would have it that if we could see the letter we might take it, and I could not be sure that would be honourable, though he puzzled me with all he said. At last he persuaded me, though I felt very shy of the young woman, to have her up again and to ask, what we might have asked before, whether M. de Lantenac had been in since Mr. Bligh had called, and whether he had had his letters.

No, he had not been in since four that day. As for his letters, she did not know what business it could be of others; but if I wished to know, his letters had been delivered to a young man whom he occasionally employed, and who called and took them perhaps half-an-hour ago, perhaps three-quarters.

My heart sank terribly at this news. I asked humbly if she could tell us where the young man was to meet the gentleman.

That she couldn't, she said, not being by nature fond of asking questions which didn't concern her.

There was no use in waiting, as she said M. de Lantenac might not be back till late. I could only think that Harry and I would come very early the next morning, and go away wishing I could have carried better news to Molly. Something which I said, however, to the young woman told her that Dick was our brother, and it seemed to change her all at once. She got very civil, and offered to take charge of a message; but my wits were not equal to one which could be of any use, so we wished her good evening and walked dismally away. Presently we heard a voice calling, and there was she breathless.

"I've just remembered that Peter said something about the landing-place under the Hoe," she said, "and 'tis my belief, Miss, that 'tis there he's gone to meet the Count."

Harry and I looked at one another. It sometimes provoked me in Harry that he never was the one to propose anything, but was always ready with objections, and I made sure he would bring up a dozen so soon as I said, with the more determination on that account,

"We must go after him, Harry."

But he only nodded, which almost took away my breath from the unexpectedness of it.

There was a great comfort in having something to do, and being obliged to do it quickly. We hurried back, and up towards the Hoe, meeting the wet wind now full in our faces, for it was blowing from the south-west and bringing the rain in with the tide, and when we got up on the Hoe the sea was grey and ruffled by a kind of vexing squall, which had no malice in it, but possible mischief; and the clouds, though nowhere very thick, were flying fast overhead, and the air seemed full of rush and sound. As I have said, there was a path which zig-zagged down from the top to the bottom, but there were shorter cuts which needed a steady head and firm footing, and with which I was well acquainted. Harry did not so much as ask whether I meant to follow; he knew that every minute we could gain might be of consequence, and he plunged directly down, and I after him. I did not think much about the difficulty at the time, there were other things to think about, but afterwards I knew that there must have been a good deal of danger in the descent. For it was growing dusk and almost impossible to see our foothold, and where there was short

grass the slipperiness was extraordinary, and the wind and rain beat in our faces and blinded us. Once Harry lost his footing altogether and went down ten or twelve feet, bruising himself hardly, and being brought up by clutching at a great bramble which grew out of the rocks. And I stepped on a loose stone, which rolled over and gave my ankle a sharp twist. But for all this, we got down pretty fast, and the break of the sea grew stronger and louder, and I think we both felt a kind of pleasure in what we were doing: I particularly, for I had often looked longingly over the edge since Molly had decided I was too old to clamber down that way.

I reached the bottom a moment before Harry, and gazed round eagerly. There were rocks and shingle on which the waves beat noisily, some boats drawn up out of the reach of the tide, and gloomy shadows, for it was much darker here under the cliff than above. I saw nothing more, nothing living, and the desolation made me shiver and catch at Harry's hand. We stumbled on over the shingle.

Suddenly a shadow moved. Somebody had been sitting on the edge of a boat, and rose up and walked a few paces away. I stood still, but Harry dragged me on.

"Make haste," he said. "What are you stopping for?"

"Is it M. de Lantenac?" I asked in a whisper.

"No. Oh, you silly, why, M. de Lantenac is a head taller! It's Peter, of course."

"Do you ask him then," I said, hanging back.

I am sure Harry despised me very much at that moment, but he said nothing before going boldly up and asking. The lad was astonished at first, and then evidently glad of some one to whom he could speak, and he was ready to grumble over his long waiting.

"Pretty nigh wet to the skin, that's watt I be," he said, "it bain't a night to be kep' walking to and fro, biding for he. No, fay."

Harry gave me a nudge that I was to take the next step, so I asked him, awkwardly enough, whether he had brought some letters for M. de Lantenac. He said yes, and pulled two or three out of his pocket, and even in the dim light I could see that one was directed in Dick's carefully rounded writing. Oh, how I longed to get it and carry it back to Mother Molly! Harry said quickly, pointing to it,—

"That's the letter we've come down for."

The lad was a stranger to us, and he gave a great laugh at Harry's words.

"To get un out o' me? I baint such a gumphead as all that, sir. You can bide and ask the Vrench gentleman hisself," he said, thrusting all the packet into his pocket, and beginning to walk backwards and forwards again whistling.

Harry and I crouched down by the side of a boat which gave us a little protection. What a strange wild waiting it was! The rush of the wind, and the quick break of waves on the pebbles, and the sea all a confused tossing mass in the darkness, with lights dancing up and down, and every now and then getting lost altogether, and my own thoughts in a whirl. For what should M. de Lantenac be doing here at such an hour and in such weather? What would be the fate of Dick's note? And what, oh, what would Molly be feeling all this time?

I suppose we had waited three-quarters of an hour, though it seemed a great deal longer, when we heard a step crunching on the shingle close by, and so cramped and stiffened was I that, before I could get myself quite up, M. de Lantenac was almost touching me. He started back as I rose, with an exclamation

which sounded like an oath, and pulled something out of the bosom of his coat which caught the light and gave me no doubt 'twas a pistol. I cried out in terror to him not to shoot, for it was only I.

"Not so loud," he said, uneasily. "Who is I? Not——"

He made a quick step forward, and I think, our voices being so much alike, for the moment he fancied 'twas Molly herself.

"I am Nan Bligh," I said, "and this is Harry, and we have come to ask you to do us a great favour."

"Me?" he said in amazement, and then, as Peter had joined us, he said courteously, "Pardon me, dear mademoiselle, one moment," took the letters, and gave a hasty direction, which made the lad hurry off. "A favour?" he said, coming back. "And you have come here on this bad night to demand it. But who told you?—how did you know I should be here?"

He asked these last questions quickly and suspiciously, and as at this moment a faint and watery gleam of moonlight broke through the clouds, I could see his face looking down upon us. I have never forgotten it. I have never forgotten that look, the keen eye, the long nose, the bare and sallow cheeks.

"The maid at Mr. Newman's told us the lad was coming here with your letters," I said timidly. There was something about him different from what I had ever noticed before, something which made me uneasy. And yet he spoke kindly.

"See then, my child, I have no minutes to spare. What can I do for you?"

But I think he knew, for he had looked down at the letters in his hand, and I saw something like triumph cross his face.

"It is Dick's letter," I said, with my voice trembling, "it was a mistake that he wrote it to you, sir; and if you are his friend, Mother Molly begs you to give it back to us."

"Ah. This letter?" he said, fingering it thoughtfully. "Do you know what you are asking?"

"Nothing that can be of consequence to you, if you are what you say you are," I answered, getting bolder.

"That is true," he said with a mocking smile. "Nevertheless, I assure you I value my friend's letters."

Harry pulled my sleeve. Two men at a short distance were pushing a boat down towards the water. I grew desperate.

"Pray, pray, sir, give it to me," I said imploringly. "Molly begs you to do so."

"She should have come herself," he said, with his voice a little changed. He walked away a few steps and back again. "Come," he said, "you should go home."

I could think of nothing to say but the one entreaty.

"Give it to me, please! She will be so grateful."

"Grateful!" he cried out with sudden passion, "what good will it do me if she is grateful? Will she speak to me? let me be in the room with her? show her gratitude, as you call it, in any way which will give me so much as a moment's content? Oh, I know what it means, that! And see here, it is not *that* I value."

What could I say? I did not half understand what he meant, I only saw that he was strangely moved. I stared at him speechless. There was nothing more for me to urge, though he thrust the letters within his waistcoat.

"Will you tell her what I have said," he went on in the same tone. "Tell her she might have got from me whatever she wished, but it must have been by stronger means than she has chosen to employ. I am

not a dog, to leap to her hand for the crumb she would fling me."

And yet, though he said these words, he hesitated—I knew he hesitated. He looked out at the sea, at the boat, at me. There was a struggle going on in his heart, he had not drawn out his hand from where it held the letters. I waited. In an instant he had pulled them out again.

"Well," he said slowly, "I will give her what she wants. It will be my last present. But I must read it first."

"No, no," I cried, starting forward. He put me back with his hand on my arm.

"Be quiet," he said sternly.

He read it slowly, every word; once I thought he sighed over it. Then he folded it up, and gave it to me with a bow more like his old self than anything I had seen in him that night.

"There, mademoiselle," he said, "that is the reward of your courage. Try to think kindly of me still, you and my good friend Dick. For mademoiselle, your sister——"

He never ended the sentence. He stood for a moment looking at the shingle under his feet, then

"WHERE COULD IT BE GOING?"

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waved his hand, and walked rapidly towards the boat and sprang into it. The men pushed it off and leapt in after him; in another instant we could see its black outline tossing up and down upon the waves, and hear the splash of the oars. Where could it be going? On what strange enterprise was he bent? Only some desperate purpose could have taken him out that night into the Sound, and what had Dick's letter to do with it? Harry and I kept close by each other; he was even glad, I think, to slip his hand into mine, as we went up the little path, beaten by wind and rain, and with a great fear in our hearts.

For though the letter was safe in my dress, M. de Lantenac had read it. And, oh, what would become of father if he knew that Dick had helped the French into Plymouth!

CHAPTER IX.

THE COPPLESTONE FAMILY.

IT has always been difficult to me to recall what happened afterwards on that night. Molly has told me since that it was near eleven o'clock before we got home, but to me it is like a confused mist. I was bitterly disappointed that the letter should have been read, and greatly exhausted for want of food, and aching with fatigue and wet. Molly's own terrors and her self-reproach that she had let me go, were, I suspect, worse than anything we had suffered. Dick was both angry and frightened, and had been searching for us for an hour or two: indeed, we met him before we got quite home. I think Harry's account, for I was almost too much spent for speech, startled him, and that in his heart he was as thankful as Mother Molly

to see his letter in her hands; but he would not acknowledge it, and persisted 'twas all right. I know that in the middle of the night I started up, crying out that the water was black and full of drowning men, and that Molly's arms were round me, and she whispering comfort in my ear. But I do not recollect anything very clearly.

The next day I was well again. The maids were most curious; but Harry was never the boy to let out anything, and I felt this gravely enough to be careful, and to keep my counsel. And there came such disquieting news about the nearness of the French fleet, that it took off a little of their attention. The mayor and the magistrates were consulting together for hours, so 'twas said, and five hundred volunteers finally chosen out of fifteen hundred who applied, and messengers were sent round to the beacons to see if they were in order, and Mr. Boscawen came to ask if arrangements had been made for our escape, or whether he could do anything.

Molly was persuaded that this approach of the French had something to do with M. de Lantenac's evening expedition. She stood at the window of our room, straining her eyes towards that bit of water which

we could see. 'Twas still ruffled and uneasy after the squalls of the past night, but the wind had gone down and was changed to the east. As for me, I did not know what to think.

"He could not have put to sea in that little boat," I said.

"The little boat could have taken him to a fishing-sloop, and the fishing-sloop might have carried him out. Don't you remember that night when we were on the Hoe, Nan? It crossed my mind then that he had some communication of the kind."

It was horrible. And yet I could not say, as I had said before, that he deserved to be shot. The tears gathered in my eyes, and Molly stooped quickly and kissed me.

"Do not you cry, Nan," she said with eagerness. "Father would be proud of his girl, if he knew what she had done."

"But I did not do it," said I. "He read the letter. Oh, I hope Dick will be more careful now."

"I think he will. I think even he suspects something. At any rate, he cannot go to the house to-day, for the volunteers are kept on close duty, and he will have no time to himself. And, Nan——"

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Copplestone has sent to know if we will go over there this afternoon. Grandfather is pretty well, and——"

She broke off again and looked wistfully at me. 'Twas easy to see she wanted not to refuse, and yet doubted how far my feelings might lead me about Mrs. Copplestone. But I think, without thought of George, after what had happened, I felt a clinging to any one who had been father's or mother's friend, and a sort of safety with them; so 'twas settled.

That morning came one of the panics. Loveday rushed in shrieking, to say that a gun had fired, and the French fleet was coming in full sail, at least a hundred, and the volunteers were drawn up, and she had seen Mr. Bedford driving away as fast as his horses could draw the coach, and that she should get her cousin, who kept a cart, to come at once and take her things and herself to a place of safety; for there was her poor mother, not to speak of a widowed sister with three helpless children, and if anything happened to her what was to become of them?

This was a question beyond the power of any of us to answer, and indeed Molly was occupied in trying to

keep grandfather from taking fright. He bore it more calmly than she expected, and we fancied 'twas from his having got accustomed to the cry of the parrot. Harry was at school, so Betty and I ran out to learn what news we could, and she was to go to Andrews and see about the waggon, if it turned out true. But though, for anything I know, a gun may have fired, there was no sign of the French ships, nor anything different in the Sound from other days; only a number of people with spy-glasses were out looking, and there was a general air of expectation abroad. 'Twas hard to suppose an enemy could be near, and yet 'twas a tempting prey for any enemy, and as I looked at the Mount Edgcumbe woods, feathering down to the water in noble sweep, I thought of the captain of the great Armada, who Father told me had fixed on Mount Edgcumbe as his own share of the spoil, and felt comforted to remember that he had been baffled, and so might others.

Betty said it most mazed her to think of Loveday's selfish plans, and her vulishness, though I fancy she found it easier to bear than if it had been the other way; and when she had borrowed a spy-glass from a man standing by, and got over the difficulty of shutting

one eye by clapping her hand tight over it, and then looked straight up towards the sky, she declared herself very well satisfied, and ready to testify to all the parish that there was no sign of the French fleet.

When we got home, we found that Loveday was actually going. Molly thought it better for her own peace of mind, and ours, and we saw her off in the cart. I believe she really thought she was acting like a heroine, though Betty did her best to undeceive her by a running fire of comments.

"What a've a gone through, noabody knowth," Loveday said, clasping her hands at the door. "A'm sure 'twas no longer ago than yesterday, the wind took'd my ombrella and flittered it, and a saith, 'Oh, my dear, what a world this be!'"

"If your mother is ill, she will be very glad to have you," said Molly, smiling.

"Mother's complaint is a chronic, and when my brother Tom went away, her saith to me, 'I vully expects you or mother'll be gone 'vore I comes back, and dont 'ee be backward in telling me of it.' But her niver thought o' this. Oh, my dear!"

"Oh, my dear!" repeated the parrot, solemnly.

No one could help laughing, to Loveday's great indignation.

Molly and I spent the rest of the morning in packing what we should have to take with us. She had already laid by what was most necessary, but it had come to the point now of having everything ready. And as we could not take all, 'twas very hard to decide on what should be left behind; for this was Mother's—and that Father's—and Dick could not bear to part with one, and I had a fancy for another, and there were old worthless things which were sure to be somebody's treasures. However, we did the best we could, and were obliged to think most of the boys, because they were not there to speak for themselves; and Madge found so much amusement in trotting backwards and forwards with her arms full of wonderful things, that she took off some of the pain of it.

After we had dined, Molly and I started for Mrs. Copplestone's, leaving Madge with Betty to take care of grandfather. And Mr. Bedford had promised to look in, and bring him a fine specimen of a humming-bird moth which he had caught in his garden. The Copplestones' was a large house, close on the road, with a square piece of ground beyond it, and myrtles

and lemon-verbenas growing up some twelve feet high. Admiral Copplestone was dead, but it was one of the houses where there was always plenty of stir and bustle going on; Sir John Parker, a brother of Mrs. Copplestone's, lived there; there was Ella, a girl older than Molly, and two younger who fitted nearer me, and a governess; and, as I have said, 'twas a busy, active house.

In the passage were boxes, showing the same preparations going forward as with us; and Mrs. Copplestone, Mary, and the governess, were in the sitting-room packing some china vases. Mrs. Copplestone kissed us and pointed to her work.

"They're not worth so much, but I am resolved the French shall not be the better for anything they find here. Nan, my dear, hold up your head and do not poke. Have you got everything ready, Molly? Depend upon it, there's no time to be lost. Where do you mean to go?"

"Our servant, Betty Coombes, has a brother living on Dartmoor, near Bickleigh, and he is ready to take us in," said Molly.

"You'll be having the children lost in a bog. Well, perhaps 'tis not so bad a place, if Mr. Ridley can bear

it. I almost wish I were going there too, to look after you."

"Oh, I wish you were!" cried Molly, more eagerly than I thought there was any need.

"But 'tis all settled that we drive over Haldon to Exeter. Sir John has a house in Paul Street, and everything is got ready for us there. I hope we shall pass Haldon by day," went on Mrs. Copplestone, who had an absolute horror of robbers. "Now, Mary, you and Elizabeth can take Nan into the garden for an hour."

The two girls and I were glad enough to get together, for, owing to one thing and another, we had not seen each other for three weeks and more. We climbed up an acacia-tree, which was always our favourite spot, and sitting on its boughs we could see up the river, and the shipping, and the woods. Of course we could talk of nothing but the French, and I found they were wild for them to come.

"'Twould be dreadful not to go to Exeter," said Mary.

"But I am afraid mother will be in a hurry," said Elizabeth. "She gets so soon frightened. I should like to see the fighting first."

"And perhaps our fleet may beat them off. Suppose we should see the 'Invincible!'"

They said "Yes!" and looked at me with a respect which I found very pleasant; for when the "Invincible" was mentioned, we all knew that Father was the captain, while George was only lieutenant.

"Oh, I wish we could hear that they were coming in this minute!" said Mary, with a sigh. I should have said the same but for one thing, the thought that perhaps Dick had helped them on their way. And I knew it was this which kept Mother Molly so grave when she spoke of them, for she was not naturally more timid than any of the rest of us.

'Twas very agreeable up in the great acacia. I don't know that there was any tree in which I liked better to sit, for the boughs were thick and pleasant, with forked resting-places, and the leaves were light and shaded, without keeping out the sun; and though people speak against girls climbing trees, I could never be the one to forbid it, when I remember what happy hours I passed in the cool leafage myself.

Mary was very well pleased to go to Exeter, where they had some cousins; but Elizabeth would have liked Dartmoor better, for I always faithfully retailed

Betty's stories to them, and they knew as well as I did about the grey man, and the pixies, and the witches, to say nothing of the pixie-house which we might be able to see for ourselves if we went near Sheepstor. So we promised to keep our journals closely, that we might read them together when we met again, and then we should see which had the most wonderful adventures to relate. And I think this promise set our hearts burning, and was partly the cause of what I shall have to tell you by-and-by; for there was always a sort of foolish emulation between us three, as to which should do this and that and the other, only since Mrs. Harty's words I had pretty well managed to keep it out of my head. They had caught something of Mrs. Copplestone's way of thinking, that all was best which came from them or their house, and I was inclined to fall into just the same groove for ourselves. It had led me into trouble once in this very tree in which we were sitting, at a time when I was no bigger than Harry, and Father was at home and in the house; for it was who should go up highest, and when we had all gone as high as 'twas safe, I must needs go higher, and this ended in a branch breaking, and in a dreadful downfall of mine. Luckily, the branches

caught me, and let me down pretty gently, but I twisted my ankle terribly, and Father carried me all the way home on his shoulder, though Mrs. Copplestone wanted to have out the chariot.

By-and-by we were called into the house to help empty the great china jars of the pot pourri. There was one always standing on the staircase, into which we used to dig our hands as we ran upstairs; and Mrs. Copplestone was so determined the French should find no luxuries in her house, that she made us turn out all the rose-leaves into an old sheet and sew it up. And then the coachman carried it up to the tallett.

She was of a most liberal nature, and the poor round about throve very well upon this flitting. And, indeed, there was such distress all over Devonshire, that charity was stirred on all sides. Our woollen and serge trade had suffered most sadly through the long-continued wars, and bread was very high, to say nothing of taxes, and the loss of labour; and the Poor's Portion House was overcrowded, so that 'twas pleasant to see the faces of those who got fine helpings out of her stores, and here and there a blanket. Sir John Parker, being a justice of the peace, was holding council with the mayor and other gentlemen;

and Ella had carried off Molly to her own room, where I felt sure they were talking of George, and we worked very briskly, so that Mrs. Copplestone praised us, and told me if I gave up stooping she should have good hopes of me.

We had supper earlier than usual, Molly being in haste to return; and a pleasant meal it was, though most of the silver had been packed away, and the old family pictures taken down from the walls. But the sun shone in very warm and bright, and the smell of the myrtle and the hum of bees made it seem cheerful. The bees were to be left, of course, and I think Mrs. Copplestone had an idea that if they were meddled with, they would do their part against the invaders, for she always held that they knew more than was supposed, and could distinguish.

When we had finished off our supper with bread and cream, they came out to see us off, and made us go round to the yard, and there were three great waggons standing laden with boxes, and ready to be driven off whenever the horses were put in. I am certain there was no family in all Plymouth so ready with their preparations, and when Molly said so, Mrs. Copplestone was greatly pleased.

"Take Time by the forelock, my dear; that has been my motto all my life. If you wait till he's past, there's nothing but running, and hurrying, and getting out of breath with hanging on behind."

"But, mother," said Ella, who had a twinkle in her eye like George, "what will you do if they don't come?"

"Set you all to unpack them, and be thankful," said her mother, good-humouredly. "But they *will* come, and then you will see the use of being ready. 'Twould not surprise me in the least if we were all turned out of our beds to-night with the news. Molly, my dear, I don't like to think of you with no one to take heed for you."

And, to my surprise, she was kissing her with tears in her eyes, while Molly clung to her.

"We have Dick," she said, looking up at George's mother.

"Dick!" repeated Mrs. Copplestone, with a little scorn; "and the Frenchman too, I suppose. There, now, I didn't mean it, but 'tis you will have to look after Dick. Well! it can't be helped, I suppose. Good-bye, my Moll, and God bless you."

She kissed me, too, told me to hold up my head,

and be a good girl; and they let us out at the yard-gates, waving their hands so long as they could see us. There was so much of a farewell in it, that it made us feel very strongly what might be at hand, and almost indeed as if it were come, and to Mother Molly I am sure 'twas like another parting from George. So we walked quickly along without speaking, only keeping close.

At last I said—I could not help it—

"Molly, what would Mrs. Copplestone have said if she had heard where Harry and I were last night?"

"She would have said I was not fit to have the charge of you."

"Shall you ever tell her?"

"I don't know. But some day ——"

"Yes?"

"Some day I shall tell George."

It was something so new to her to talk freely of him to me, that she never mentioned his name without a little shade of hesitation.

We had nearly reached home when we met Mr. Newman, and he stopped.

"Excuse me, Miss Bligh," he said, "but I have been to your house to ask a question, and was disap-

pointed to find no one. I am aware that your brother has seen a good deal of the French gentleman that has been lodging with me, and I understand that two of your family were at my house last night inquiring for him. Can you tell me whether Mr. Richard has any tidings of him to-day?"

Molly's face changed as he spoke.

"My brother is out with the volunteers," she faltered. "He has been on duty all day, and 'tis not likely he has seen anything of M. de Lantenac. Is he not returned?"

"No. 'Tis very strange," said Mr. Newman, uneasily. "For one of his nation, and at such a time—though I would stake my fortune upon his honesty. My wife and I have been absent two days, and I find, on coming back, he did not sleep at home last night. Can you tell me what was discovered of his movements last night?"

Molly hesitated, and I got very red.

"He had a paper of my brother's that we wished to reclaim," she said, in a low voice. "Hearing something about the landing-place from your servant, my sister and Harry went there and saw him. They saw him, too, go off in a boat. That is all I can tell you,

sir, and I do beseech of you to consider it as private, unless the contrary is absolutely necessary."

"Not a soul shall know of it," he said, in a tone of such hearty certainty as lifted a weight off my mind. But 'twould have been hard to have refused Molly, with the colour coming and going in her cheeks, and her lips resting apart. Then he asked, "Did you get possession of the paper? That's well. If your brother has news of him, I should be glad to hear it; if none comes, we must hope for some to-morrow. But 'tis strange, certainly strange."

He went away with an evident oppression of anxiety on his mind. And Mother Molly and I looked at each other; and I said, for the twentieth time,—

"But, oh, he read it, he read it!"

CHAPTER X.

PANIC.

"Many a light fishing-bark put out to pry along the coast;
And with loose rein and bloody spur rode inland many a post."
MACAULAY'S *Armada.*

DICK came in late that night, very tired and very uneasy. He had heard the report of M. de Lantenac's absence, and 'twas evident it had made a great impression upon him, and that his mind was much distressed. If I had been Molly, I don't think I could have helped showing him 'twas no more than I expected, but she was never the one to say, "I told you so," and only was the more tender with him. And he had another trouble on his mind: the volunteers, under Mr. Bastard of Kitley's command, having

to convey the prisoners of war the next day from Plymouth to Exeter. It pained him grievously to think that he must leave his grandfather and sisters without any to see after them, and for the moment it staggered Mother Molly. But she was not long in finding out the best side of it; for, after all, if the French came, Dick could not have left his duties to see to us, and now she would have the comfort of thinking him safe. So she got him his supper, and did what she could to cheer him.

He was to start very early in the morning, and she kept waking through the night. There were many others in the same way, we heard afterwards, and people running out to look towards Maker Tower, from whence a close watch was kept on the Channel. Still nothing came to cause increased uneasiness, and indeed in the morning a privateer got safely in with her prize, to the great delight of the townspeople.

Dick started, looking very pale and disheartened in spite of all that Molly could do. We went out to see them pass across the fields from Millbay barracks, feeling almost sorry for the poor prisoners, who were being snatched away, as it must have seemed to them, just when they had cause to hope. And before we

came in, we saw the man with the mail-bags riding as fast as he could into the town, for 'twas a time when they did not spare their cattle in the carrying of news.

The last two days Molly had kept me at home instead of letting me go as usual to Mrs. Deeble's. 'Twas a time indeed in which, with we knew not what hanging over us, we could not settle to anything except what we were forced to, such as the reading to grandfather. People went from one to another asking what they had heard, and the difficulty was great of meeting with any trustworthy tidings. Mr. Bedford used to lament the old days of the "Plymouth Weekly Journal;" for now, when 'twas so much craved for, we had no newspaper at all.

Molly and I slipped out on the Hoe so soon as we were able to see what we could for ourselves. We noticed a number of people under the Hoe Gate, but they were standing about very freely, and to see one knot more than another gave us no surprise. However, we saw a King's ship beating down Channel, and making but little way, and it was surmised by those who were authorities where there was doubt about most things, that she was the "Ardent."

This caused great excitement, for 'twas wondered what took her there, and whether 'twas possible that Sir Charles Hardy's fleet might be nearer than was thought, and meaning to fight. And I could not turn away my eyes from watching, and begged and prayed Mother Molly to stay a little longer.

Just when she could do no more for me in that way, Mr. Boscawen came up to us, walking very fast. He was a little old gentleman, and 'twas plain that something had disturbed him, for his three-cornered hat and periwig were pushed on one side, and his silk stockings splashed with mud, and he was swinging his cane excitedly.

"Heard the news, Mrs. Molly?" he called out before he reached us.

"No more than usual, sir," she said, wondering.

"Then you make the round dozen of those I have told. And the sweetest of all," he added, sweeping his hat to the ground, at which she laughed. "I would let you guess, but that my sister Haryet knows nothing of it yet, and 'twill so amaze her! Ah, those Frenchmen—the best of them—are not to be trusted."

Molly's hand trembled in mine.

"Is it M. de Lantenac?" she asked faintly.

"Picked up off Drake's Island this morning by a fishing-boat. 'Twas that squally night, no doubt."

"Dead!"

"Dead?—yes, drowned, of course. What would you have him be, my dear Mrs. Molly, when he had been in the water all that time?" asked Mr. Boscawen, a little testily. "The question is, what was he doing out there? I am afraid he's been making fools of some of us."

He was moving off in a hurry to retail his news, when Molly with an effort stopped him.

"Are you certain it is true, sir?"

"True? As true as that you and I are talking to each other. Seen the ship? Looks as if she were walking into the enemy's mouth, don't it? I'll drop in by-and-by, and bring you some more particulars."

When he had gone away, I looked at Molly. She had her hand pressed tight on her eyes.

"Come," she said, in a strange voice; "don't talk to me now, I can't bear it."

We went home quite silently, with a sort of fear and

horror upon us. So lately had I seen him, so much had he been in our minds, that 'twas scarce possible to conceive that he was dead. And other thoughts kept rising up, whether we would or no.

About one o'clock, after grandfather had had his dinner, Mr. Newman came with a very grave face. He saw at once that we knew some of his tidings, though not all.

"Perhaps I ought to rejoice," he said, "after what has come out; but my wife and I, we liked him so much, and had so high an opinion of him, that I would give my biggest ship to know 'twas not true. And yet, of course, 'tis, in one sense, a mercy."

"Is it known, then, that he was a spy?" asked Molly, in a low voice.

"Beyond a question," Mr. Newman said, sadly. "In the pocket-book which was found on him, were papers giving close information as to the number of men in the citadel, with a plan of the batteries, and an account how short we run of ammunition. Sure, Miss Bligh, you have great cause for thankfulness that Mr. Richard's note was not among them!"

Sure, indeed! Our hearts had been dwelling on this

before he spoke. Molly made a little sign with her hand, she could not say anything.

"I do not blame your brother," he went on, more quickly. "I have been too much his dupe myself, though, I thank Heaven, I never told him much. But 'twas natural Mr. Richard should be taken in. The pleasantest companion!—the most kindly listener!—Well, well, he's gone, and Plymouth folk should be thankful. But I should like to ask Miss Anne what she saw that night."

I told him, very closely, everything. When I had finished, he said one of the men had been drowned, but the other had clung to the overturned boat, and been picked up. All that he knew was, that they had been paid a good sum to take M. de Lantenac out to a fishing-sloop which lay off the island. The sloop was no longer there, and 'twas most likely had made her way out. Mr. Newman, who took a very kindly interest in us, from the respect he bore to my father, assured us there was no need for it to be known that Harry and I had that interview. No one was likely to have noticed us, except the man at the Hoe Gate, and he was the most silent and surly fellow in Plymouth.

"And you are persuaded, sir," said Molly anxiously, "that there was nothing of Dick's among his papers?"

"Nothing."

"Nor in those at your house?"

"Most happily, nothing whatever. I was coming to tell you of these. They have all been delivered to Mr. Freeman, the Mayor, and are of the same character. But there is a paper which concerns you."

"Of what kind, sir?"

"'Tis a request to the French commander that he would respect the houses of one or two families who have shown the writer much kindness. Mine is one, but the first on the list is yours."

"I would he had left it out," cried Molly, with such haughtiness that I stared. But she recovered herself in a moment. "God forgive me!" she exclaimed, "the poor man being dead!"

Mr. Newman went away, and I longed for Harry to come home and hear about it, Molly not seeming able to speak. I have thought since that there were many things pulling her different ways when she thought of M. de Lantenac, more than she could bear; but at the time I was chiefly taken up with Dick's escape, and wondered what he would say when he came to know

about it. It seemed a week at least since he went away that morning.

Nor was the day ended yet, nor Mr. Boscawen's news. He came in, quite out of breath, just as Harry returned. And this time what had been so often reported was really true. A fleet was in sight, and there was no doubt it was the French, and the "Ardent" was in the greatest danger. And hearing this and no more, Harry and I never waited an instant, but took to our heels, and ran with all our might up to the Hoe.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

"The French fleet
Rule in the narrow seas."—TENNYSON.

'TWAS dreadful to have to acknowledge it, but we could all see that the "Ardent" was taken. There was no disgrace in it, as they turned out to be near ninety in number, and she but one; but no one could understand how she had gone straight, as it were, into their very jaws. Afterwards it turned out that she supposed them to be the English ships, commanded by Sir Charles Hardy, with which she was seeking to effect a junction, and only found out her mistake too late to mend it.

But now, with the enemy in sight, and nothing really

to prevent their sailing in, the panic at Plymouth was at its height, and past my describing. There were numbers of children up, gazing, on the Hoe, and the mothers were flying about catching them up, and dragging them along, with the hope of getting off to safe quarters. Those that had not yet got their monies out of the bank were running there in the greatest anxiety, the church-bells rang an alarm, though I am sure 'twas not needed, and it is said that the dock-yard commissioner sent off a man and horse at full speed to learn from the Admiralty Court whether he should burn his Majesty's dockyard at once, or wait for the French admiral to come and do it!

Harry and I knew that we ought to go back, but found it almost impossible to tear ourselves away from the wall. We could see the soldiers running to man the guns in the citadel, and smoke going up from the fire at Maker, and 'twas a wonderful feeling to know that what had been so long talked of was come at last, so that it was before our very eyes.

We went home when we had not the face to stay any longer, and it was getting towards evening. All along, as we went, we saw preparations for flight; some people hurrying away at once, others having

carts and waggons packed at their doors, but with no intention of starting until the enemy was come completely in. The streets were so narrow that in some there was an absolute block; for where one carriage could scarce pass, a whole string was trying to get through, and the cattle were being driven off, too, according to the King's orders, beforehand, and added their bleating and baaing to the Babel. The watchmen were about, trying to preserve order; but I am sure the noise was enough to frighten the French, could they only have heard it.

Molly gave us a look of reproach, Betty having been out and failed to see us, and there being so much to be done. She had made up her mind to start that very evening, and the waggon was coming presently. If it had not been for grandfather, she would have waited longer, but she dared not risk the terror of a more sudden flight. And she wanted sadly to take Harry, and run over to Mrs. Harty, not being able to bear leaving without seeing her, and also desiring to make a last effort to persuade her to go with us.

So I remained with Betty, to put Madge to bed till we should start, and to get all we could downstairs, and to see that grandfather was not disquieted.

Betty was very full of the poor old people in the almshouses, who, she heard, were in a great taking, but comforted herself with the thought that some one would look after them. And she was in high spirits at the near prospect of seeing her brother, yet grieved for the kitchen things that must needs be left behind, and the house shut up. Grandfather came to the door two or three times, with a troubled face, to ask for Molly, her absence seeming to bewilder him the most.

Mr. Andrews was very good in sending the waggon as he had promised, though we found afterwards that, being a large-sized one and commodious, he had been offered a high sum for it by others. The man helped us with a hearty will, and Betty and I stowed away more things than Mother Molly had thought possible by the time she got home. She had found Mrs. Harty absolutely determined to go no further than to Mr. Radcliffe's at Warleigh,—and not there unless the French were to proceed to extremities,—professing that she dreaded the shaking more than the enemy, and had always been brought up to think well of French civility. 'Twas like her to be so cheery, but Molly could not bear the thought that she was left behind.

Betty was determined we should have a good

supper before we started, and went off, between whiles, to see to it, and to fry the bacon. But knowing how much we had to leave, which went to our hearts, 'twas half comical and half provoking to see how she would rush out to the waggon with something she had just caught up, the flour-barrel, or the chopper, or the frying-pan; and when Molly remonstrated, she would assure her she had just "pesed" it in her hand, and the weight was nothing. Harry had to carry the things back more than once, which put her into great dudgeon.

'Twas a strange loading that night! Before 'twas finished we had to fasten a lantern to the garden-gate, and people as they passed by would call out all sorts of disquieting things as to the vessels that had been seized. But, talk as they might, 'twas certain that the "Ardent" was the only ship we lost, though 'tis true there were a number of fishing-boats taken that were out in Cawsand Bay. There's no end, however, to the marvellous events that are sure to crop up when the people are beside themselves, as they were that night, and 'twas who had the worst to tell, with but few unbelieving listeners.

So far as I was concerned, I did not know what to

feel. I did not like to think that we were running away, and the thought how different it was from what any one belonging to the "Invincible" should do, nearly choked me. But there was something about the waggon again that I found most inviting; the two stout grey horses that stood patiently; the smell of the fresh sweet hay shaken out on the ground before them for them to eat and meditate over, as a good Devonshire cart-horse will do; the lantern casting its dim ray of light on familiar things, which seemed to have grown shadowy and strange from their unfamiliar surroundings; and then, besides all this, the distant cries, windows opening and shutting, the neighbours running out, the stars beginning to shine softly in the clear twilight sky—there was a delight in it all which kept one's blood flowing warmly.

Mother Molly went up at last and dressed Madge, putting on Mrs. Harty's little red cloak. We all wore them alike that night, and 'twas a constant joke for Betty, that if we met the French, they would take us for the soldiers, though how we were to meet them before they had landed nobody knew. And when Molly had brought down Madge scarce awake, and rubbing her sleepy eyes with her little hands, she

asked grandfather to get into the waggon and to take the child on his knees, which he did, though with a wondering sadness in his look, when he passed out, which was piteous.

We settled them as comfortably as we could with the hay all round, and the next to be put in was the parrot, who had been asking questions all the evening, and startling the waggoner out of his wits, with his "Vrench be coming; ees, fay!" but stopped talking from sheer amazement when he found himself in the waggon; and then Betty appeared with something tucked slily under her arm, which, when we had got some way, turned out to be the fish-kettle, which Molly had told her she might not on any account bring. Harry clambered up by the waggoner, and all was ready, except for Molly and me. 'Twas the strangest feeling I have ever known in my life, when we looked for the last time into the rooms, and put out the lights and turned the key. It seemed cruel to the old house, having loved it dearly, to leave it to the mercy of the enemy and make off ourselves, and though Molly was never one for crying, I saw the tears running down her cheeks as we turned away. Luckily, Madge had fallen asleep in grandfather's

arms, and he was so taken up with placing her comfortably, that he scarcely noticed when we started.

Right through the town we had to go, and the time it took no one would believe. The narrowness of the streets was a great drawback when all were in a hurry and urging on their horses, and in particular about the shambles and Butchers' Lane 'twas almost impossible to pass. The Guildhall was lighted, and 'twas said the mayor and councilmen were there consulting, and all the arches underneath it were crowded thickly with people who were waiting to have the first news of whether anything could be done for the town. Grandfather was plainly uneasy with the feeling of so much noise and disquiet about him, and the frequent stoppages and sometimes backings which we were forced to make, though Will Hartland was thoughtful, and drove with as much care and caution as was possible. But 'twas an immense relief to get out by the new buildings in Whitecross Street, and feel the crowd a little lessened.

All along the road, however, to Plympton S. Mary, there was an extraordinary difference from the quiet which generally marked it. Chariots there were, and carts, but mostly a number of foot-passengers carrying

their goods as best they might, and seeking at least to put a couple of miles between them and the dreaded French. And many of the women, who stopped on the bridge as we did, and looked back towards their homes, broke out into sharp crying for their husbands, and what they had left behind.

After we passed Ridgeway, we got into the Vale of Torry, and then had a long climb, for the waggon was well loaded, and we had begged the driver not to press his horses. His little dog, which had been perched by his side, jumped down to run up the hill, and Harry and I both got down too. We were out of the way of other travellers, and 'twas delightful to feel ourselves completely in the country, and at such an unaccustomed hour. The great waggon lumbered along, casting deep shadows, for the night was light and clear, and we could see the heather beginning to lie in the hedges, and such glow-worms as I have never beheld before or since. And there was a fragrance of earth and of growing things, and a little sound of rustle in the air, which meant the breeze moving the stalks of the ripening corn, and here and there great ox-daisies gleaming like stars by the road-side. And the freshness of the moor air which met us as we

climbed the hill, and the uncertainty of what lay before us, put us into such spirits, that Harry and I were racing and whooping all the way, to the great joy of the little dog.

We wanted Molly to get down, for, though she was Mother Molly, she had not lost her love of a run. But she would not leave grandfather, she said. And though she said nothing to us at the time, she told me afterwards that she felt a good deal of uneasiness because of highwaymen. Not that they were much heard of about there, but yet this was a solitary road, and growing more so every mile, and the panic in Plymouth getting known, 'twould be guessed also that those who fled would carry their money with them, as was the case. So that 'twas not unlikely men would be found ready to make their harvest out of other folks' misfortunes. If there had been an alarm, she said, she was determined to slip the bag into Betty's fish-kettle. As it turned out, it was lucky she did not do so beforehand.

I put down her not getting out to her thoughts about M. de Lantenac, and certainly he was much in her mind. But Harry would not talk about him. I asked him whether 'twould not have been dreadful if

we had missed seeing him that night, and the note had been found in his pocket-book?

"What's the use of talking about ifs?" he said. "We didn't miss him, and the note wasn't found."

"Well, but just suppose!"

"Oh, I hate supposing. Here, catch hold of this leaf, and I'll get up a big glow-worm to show baby."

But she was asleep again, and grandfather bade us put it back very carefully. And by this time we had reached the top of the hill, and were called to look at one of the fires blazing on Pen Beacon, and sending its news for miles round. If it had only been day, Betty said, we should have seen the Sound as clearly as possible, though a good seven miles off. And this left us dismal for some minutes, until we heard the moor was near at hand, and Betty made us sniff the burning peat.

I meant to keep myself wide awake the whole night long, but what with the events of the day, and the racing up the hill, and the swaying of the waggon, and Will's broad shoulders blotting out the sky and stars, I lost all count of things just when I had set myself to think steadily of what had passed in the last two days, and was awakened from a dream

of Father by a scream from Betty, and the waggon stopping with a slow jolt. It took a minute to recollect where we were. Betty was crying loudly,—

"I've drawed un out, I've drawed un out! Stop, Will!"

"What's oop?" demanded Will phlegmatically.

"'Tes the veesh-kettle. I dreamt there wor an apple-drain buzzin', and I flinged somethin' at un, and I've drawed the kettle right out tu the back of the cart!"

All this while she was bundling out of the waggon, and Molly laughing so she could hardly help her. We supposed she would soon pick it up, but when we put out our heads this did not seem so likely. For the road was no better here than a furzy lane, all on a slope, so that one side of the waggon was up higher than the other, and from what Will said, it seemed the ground fell sharply down towards the river which we could hear brawling at the bottom, and the night was at its darkest.

"Reckon her woan't find un so aisy. Ground's main stickle down theer," said Will Hartland with a chuckle.

Harry got down to help her, and then I joined him,

and a fine hunt we had, Betty bemoaning her dream all the time. 'Twas a very steep fall, as Will had said, and covered with brambles and fuzzy brakes as she called them, which looked one as black as the other, and each as black as the fish-kettle. Betty made energetic dashes at the same things whenever she came across them, and got her fingers covered with scratches and prickles, and slipped up, but all to no avail.

"To think I should ha' brought un for such an en'!" she kept on saying, half crying, "'Tes thicky stroyl keps hidin' un."

"'Tis the pixies," said Harry boldly.

"Now whatever's possessed the boy to zay zo?" said Betty, lifting herself up, and speaking in a tone of deep vexation. "Come along, Miss Nan, it bain't a bit o' good to bide here noa longer."

And she neither looked to the right nor the left, but clambered straight up the bank again to the waggon in silence. Harry and I followed.

"Betty's scared at the pixies," said Harry with a grin. "I say, Nan, you and I'll come here by daylight, and have a hunt for the old thing."

And now, if we had had the light to see it, we

should have looked down on one side into the beautiful vale of Bickleigh, and on the other have seen the great tors rising boldly against the sky, and in front of us the heights of Shaugh and Dewerstone. And indeed we had gone so slowly, and here and there stopped to rest the good horses, and here and there got out and walked up a lane steeper than ordinary, that before we left our present road, and turned sharply to the left, there came a gradual lightening of the darkness, and towards the east a promise of the day. And all the sight which followed was so strange to us, and so fresh in its beauty and glory, that it forced us into wakefulness, and into following each new delight.

For though the light, as it crept upwards from some unseen source, was at first cold and wan, and brought nothing better than dull greys and gloomy outlines into view, and a mist rolled slowly along the course of the river, presently as if by enchantment a flush of warmer colour had tinged the heavens. A strange clear yellow spread over the east, and here and there a bar of cloud was edged with rosy red. Instead of the dusky glories of the sunset, there was a wonderful freshness and brightness, a glittering of dew, a keen

exhilaration in the air, a laughing gladness abroad over the earth. Busy chirpings and rustlings broke out on all sides, the larks poured out their hearts for joy, rabbits peeped from their burrows, we heard water rushing, and could fancy how, far away, Plymouth Sound was twinkling in innumerable little waves. Up here all the wild moorland, which for the first time we saw about us, had awakened into happy life, the granite tors cast deep shadows on the brown and peaty ground, the ferns had lost nothing of their vivid green, the heather was beginning to cover the turf with lilac patches, and the blackberry-flowers starred the banks with cheerful promise.

We drove along a rough moor-track, so narrow, sometimes, that 'twas a marvel how the waggon could pass, and Betty was peering everywhere, full of joy at having reached her own, and pointing out to us the little pasture crofts, the pooks of hay ready for carrying, the black peat-stacks, here and there circles where she said the "Old Men" used to live long years ago. To our left were groups of oak trees, but, to my great joy, we turned off from them across the highland by a yet wilder track among the furze bushes, and passing along it with great difficulty, and many "wugs," and

"coame ups" from Will Hartland, made a sudden dip and found ourselves before a small farm, built of grey moor-stone, with a yard on one side and a single stunted oak before it.

Betty was out of the waggon before any one knew what she was about, and banging at the door with both hands.

"John! Thirza! where be tu! where be kepping yerselves? Heer us be! Oppen the door!"

It seemed a strange way of announcing the arrival of an unexpected party, but as Betty was at home she could only be left to her own mode of proceeding. And, though she was impatient, it was not very long before we saw a woman appear at the door, and immediately afterwards a man.

There were no very hearty signs of welcome. They shook hands with Betty, stared at us, and all went into the house. But presently Betty came running out, very cheerful and contented. Things would soon be ready. Thirza was lighting the kitchen fire. John would come and help Will. Would we please to get down?

We all turned out of the waggon, Madge opening her blue eyes in wonder. A short, sad-looking man

came out and pulled his hair by way of greeting. The kitchen, with its lime-ash floor, was full of peat-smoke, the woman, who was pushing the peats together with an iron crook, hardly turned round on our entrance. Betty bustled about, upstairs and down, told us openly that Thirza was rather moody-hearted, but meant us well, and would get us some breakfast as soon as the fire was lighted.

"Tes a lone plaace out heer, and her hevn't no wan for company, and gits out o' the way of et. How's the little maed, Thirza?"

"Her's well enough."

She said it not uncivilly, but with a kind of uncouth shyness. And I saw her looking covertly at Molly, as if, in her sweet and dainty freshness, scarcely affected by the night's unrest, she was something different from anything she had seen or imagined, which might well be when one came to think of it. Grandfather had sat down in the great settle, and Madge standing by his side, with her wondering eyes going round the kitchen, and Harry looking hard out of the window for shyness.

Betty worked with all her might, and with pride of welcome upon her. We saw that she had been in the

right in the stores she had packed into the waggon, for the house seemed barely furnished with provisions, or with anything, for the matter of that. I am sure that tea had never been seen there before, and grandfather was always used to it; so that as soon as the kettle boiled we sat down to breakfast. Thirza disappeared. I saw her looking at us through a half open door.

When we had finished, and had eaten the coarse bread with a very good appetite, we wanted to go out, but Molly would not hear of it. She said we should go up and rest. 'Twas an odd little room where we three were to sleep, grandfather and Harry being in another, and I had no more than a bed on the floor, but by the time we had looked at the beds we felt so sleepy that 'twas who should get there first; and I am sure there was not one of us but was asleep before we had lain down five minutes, and my dreams were of jolting and fish-kettles. As for the French, they seemed very far away.

CHAPTER XII.

IN SAFETY.

"Here shall we see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."—SHAKSPERE.

I WAS the first to awake, and for a very good reason. My bed, as I have said, was on the floor, and for a short time I had been half-conscious that my cheeks were being softly patted and poked, but was too sleepy to open my eyes upon the disturber. At last, I suppose the pressure became too strong, for I raised myself upon my elbow and looked round rather crossly. On the bare floor by my side was seated a child of perhaps six years old, with a thin brown face and tumbled hair, out of which two large hazel eyes stared at me with great interest. The little creature was dressed in an ugly serge frock, her legs and feet were bare, and as brown as berries, but her

face was pretty, and grew radiant with delight when she saw that she had succeeded in awakening me. She clapped her hands.

"Hush!" I said, pointing to the bed where Molly and Madge were sleeping soundly.

She looked at them, and held up her finger with a comical imitation of my reproof, then stretched over and put her arms round my neck.

"Come out, and I will show you Jack," she said in a loud whisper.

I could not help laughing, though I was still very sleepy.

"Who is Jack?"

"Don't you know?" she said in wonder. "Jack's our horse. And there's a waggon downstairs, and a bird in a cage."

There was no chance of my being left in peace, so I got up, she watching me meanwhile with the closest attention.

"Where's the water for washing?" I asked, looking round.

"Out in the brook to be sure," she said, opening her great eyes.

I recollected gladly that Betty had brought some

basins, but for the present, it seemed, I must find out the brook. "What's your name, little thing?" I asked.

"Izzy. I's mother's Izzy."

"Come then, Izzy, we'll go down to the brook."

She made no answer, but took my hand, and led me eagerly down the rough staircase. No one was in the kitchen except Polly, who sat moping and silent in his cage, but brightened up at sight of me, and put down his head to be scratched. Izzy stared hard at him, and poked her little brown fingers between the bars. I had only just time to catch them away, when Polly made a grab at them.

"You mustn't do that," I remonstrated; but before I had time to say more or to prevent her, she had struck at the cage with all the force of her little hand.

Polly screamed in terror, and I only just prevented an upset. Her face was crimson with passion, and so distorted that I felt more alarmed than angry myself.

"For shame!" I said. "Polly will never love you if you are so unkind."

"Don't want him to love me, I hate him!"

"Then you are very naughty," I said. "Polly would talk to you and play with you if you were good to him, but of course he does not know you yet."

I walked out of the door, and she came closely by my side.

"Birds can't talk," she said.

"Polly can. You would have heard him say 'Good morning' to me, if you had not been so rough."

"Would he say 'Good morning' now, if you went back and asked him?" she demanded wistfully.

"No, because you frightened him. Where's the brook?"

She pointed towards a rough building of stone, with turf filling the interstices. I was sure the child was misleading me, from the rise of the ground, and from hearing men's voices. And, moreover, my ear had caught a little gurgling sound to the left, where the moor fell away towards a few stunted trees.

"'Tis not there, for certain," I said, stopping still; "and I fear you are a naughty little girl. I shall go down there."

Her little body began to heave, and she thrust a finger into her mouth.

"I want you to see Jack," she said sullenly.

If it had been Mother Molly, I make no doubt she would have calmed the storm and brought the little creature to reason; but I was vexed with her, and never famous for patience.

"You can't always have what you want, Izzy," I said sharply, "you may show me Jack by-and-by, but I shall go down to the brook now."

She stamped her foot and pushed at me with violence as she had done at the cage, and then darted away by herself, while I turned in the opposite direction.

The sky had lost some of the clear brightness of the morning, and was soft with misty clouds which tempered the sunshine, but the sweetness and lightness of the air was what I had never felt before, and took away all my fatigue. I could see now more clearly where we stood. The moor swept up behind the house, with granite rocks projecting from the short grass, and far away to the right I caught sight of the tors standing in solemn grandeur against the sky. On the opposite side, towards which I was making my way, the ground fell sharply, clothed thickly with heather, furze, and bilberry-bushes, until it reached a bank wooded with stunted oaks and sycamores.

Down between these I plunged with great delight, the noise of water inviting me, and found at the bottom the little stream for which I had been seeking; one of those numberless little tributaries which come rushing down from the vast morasses and bogs of central Dartmoor. It was scarce six feet across, golden-brown with the peat it had washed, and it came leaping and rushing over stone and boulder, and all that stood in its way, with vigorous determination to live its life. The clearness and coolness of it, the brightness of the spray, the delight of its little pools, the bending of the leaves of the water-docks as the water leaped at them lovingly, I shall never lose; nor yet the joy with which I dragged off shoes and stockings, and waded in, and splashed about the pools, and sat on the smooth grey stones, flicking the water about with my feet. Something there was of the gladness of a discoverer in my feelings; I had found the place by myself, and it seemed, with its solitude and silence, almost to be my own. 'Twas a strange experience, and no less delicious than strange to one who had lived in Plymouth town all her life. The trees were so low and grew so thinly that they did not darken or shadow the gaiety of the little brook, only

gave it a pleasant air of quiet and retirement. Little creatures of which I did not know the names were busy on the banks, or skimming lightly over the surface of the water, a wood-pigeon began to coo softly in the wood. I waded down the brown water, or leapt from stone to stone with the most perfect contentment, until at last I made up my mind that I must go and bring the others to share my delight, and was returning to the spot where I had left my shoes and stockings when I was startled at being struck by a small clump of heather to which some of the black earth from which it had been pulled yet clung. Looking up hastily, I expected to see Harry, but instead of him, little Izzy was sitting on the bank, with her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her hands, and her great eyes watching me closely. She seemed to have forgotten her resentment, for she burst out laughing when she found I saw her.

"I've seen you ever so long, looking so funny," she cried. "Are you coming out?"

"Yes, I'm coming. What a nice place you've got here!" I said, stepping out of the water.

She did not answer. Evidently I was the curiosity of the moment, for she never took her eyes from me,

"LITTLE IZZY WAS SITTING ON THE BANK."

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and every now and then touched my frock or held it against her own.

"Now will you come and see Jack?" she said, when we had climbed up the steep ground together.

I wanted to find the others, but did not like to disappoint her again. Will and Betty's brother and Betty herself were all busy unloading the waggon; Harry had been helping them, but had rushed off to a great cairn which was at no great distance, and I saw him sitting astride the highest stone, waving his hat.

"He'll tumble down in the clatter," said Izzy composedly. "There's my dear Jack."

It was a poor old horse, lean and bony, for whom it was difficult to express any admiration, but evidently to the child a faithful friend and companion.

"You may stroke him," she said patronizingly. "*He* is good, *he* won't bite."

This was a hit at Polly.

"If he did," I said, "I should not strike him, but teach him to get to like me."

She looked at me meditatively.

"I won't bang your bird any more," she said slowly. "Perhaps he'd say 'Good morning' now. You'll stay

here, won't you? Mother took me out to see the fires blazing last night, and she said there was young ladies coming. Are you a young lady?"

It seemed an odd question to answer, but all about this child was odd. Born on these lonely hills, living a perfectly unrestrained life, hardy as a mountaineer, and wild as a mountain kid, we and she were as strange to each other as if we had belonged to a different race. She was quite fearless, inheriting none of her mother's shyness, and full of passionate impulses, likes and dislikes. Her aunt Betty looked at her as almost a wild creature, shocked at her bare feet, and long hair, and she returned the feeling by showing a strong antipathy to Betty, and marking her dislike by every means which lay in her power.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE MOOR.

"The people all within this clime
Are frozen in the winter time,
Or drown'd with snow and rain;
And when the summer is begun
They lie like silkworms in the sun,
And come to life again."

WILLIAM BROWNE, 1644.

I FEEL sometimes as if I could never make any one understand what our life on the moor was like. This is what I feel, looking back; at the time it all seemed natural enough, though delightful, children adapting themselves readily to the strange. Grandfather used, as we sometimes noticed, to cast wondering glances about him, and was uneasy if one of us or Betty were not in sight, and I think missed

Parson Bedford's visits, and the company of his books, of which we could only bring a small part; but one large compensation to him was the finding of rare flowers and insects. Some he came upon himself, and we used to bring him home more, I especially, whom he had taught something of his great love for them. The rare mosses all about, rare at any rate as to our finding them for ourselves, were a great delight. In the bogs there were most beautiful specimens of Thread and Beardless moss, and the White Fork, and the Fountain Apple, and the tors and the streams had each their own possessions. But on the bogs we dared not venture except with a farm-boy, at the least, for guide, the moor-men being generally at work. And John Coombes was always frightened lest we should go too boldly. There was most chance of my doing so, I believe, but Harry being the boy, gave him fears on his account, in particular after he had started off one morning, all by himself, and found Betty's fish-kettle, bringing it home with a dead adder inside, which he had slain on the spot, and giving Betty such a turn as was too strong for her gratitude.

However, I think, after we had heard some of the stories of that strange land of black bog, and had seen

one or two instances of its weird and awful power of sucking into treacherous depths whatever pressed unduly on its surface, we got a wholesome horror of it on our minds. And little Izzy knew where wary walking was needed, as well as any turf-cutter on the moor.

The birds were Harry's delight. Not only curlews and plovers were there calling across the desolate waste with their melancholy cry, but now and then we caught sight of the great moor-buzzard, and once Harry came home almost mad with excitement, for he had seen a huge bird sailing high and royally above the broad morass, and John Coombes had shouted and whooped, and told him 'twas an eagle.

I was a little sad at this, for it set Harry's experiences a good way above mine, and there had been a sort of rivalry between us, ever since we got out there.

My stream, which was always called Nan's brook, he affected to despise, but Mother Molly liked it as well as I; and as for Madge, 'twas her greatest delight to wade in it when the weather would let her, and though once she slipped down and got wet through, no harm came of it. I said when the weather

would let her, and that was not half the time. Plymouth has a reputation for much rain, but 'tis as nothing in comparison with the moor. Even if the day began finely, before we knew where we were there would be a mist creeping round, and the rain falling with fine steadiness. And this, and the great bog wastes, and the extraordinary scarcity of people, and the forlorn cry of the birds, gives it, I fancy, a certain sadness. Molly felt this side of it, and I think used to long to be back in Plymouth, and the moor people, what there were, had got it in their faces.

Then poor Molly had a terrible craving for news. We all wanted it, to be sure, when we thought of it; but she thought of it the most, if not all day long. Letters could not reach us. The nearest place for them was Bickleigh, and there they only came once a week. Will Hartland had taken the waggon and horses back to Bickleigh, and had promised Molly, if there was anything for her, to do his best to get it to her, but nothing had come.

I feel myself going on about the place, and the things that grew and lived on it, and keeping away from the people, the reason being that 'tis more

difficult yet to say what they were like. John Coombes himself was a silent, careful man, that seemed to me ever to be watching the weather and the moon, and snatching scanty crops out of the very teeth of the seasons. If by good fortune the pimpernel turned a blossoming face well up and open, we hardly saw him all day. Jack would be taken out with his pack-saddle on, and the bent crooks, ten feet long, swinging one on each side of the saddle, and come back laden with late hay, or by-and-by with sheaves of corn, and Izzy, perhaps, perched in triumph on the top. No cart could go where the old horse trod safely.

As for the wife Thirza, she perplexed Molly sorely. Whether from shyness or pride, she kept herself aloof from us all; she would not so much as look openly, though I fancied that she watched us pretty closely when she believed herself unperceived. 'Twas only with grandfather she came forward at all; his gentle courtesy being the same to one woman and another, and difficult for any to withstand. Betty paid her little attention, repeating her statement that she was moody-hearted, and though Mother Molly did her best to win her, the answers she got were always gruff and uncouth. 'Twas evident that she could not

endure that Izzy should be with us, Izzy herself being of a different persuasion, and keeping near one or the other with undaunted persistence, but flouting Madge in a fashion which displeased me greatly. Polly had reconciled himself to his new quarters; called Shep, the sheep-dog, and puss, in a beguiling manner which made their lives a burden to them, and added to his stock of Devonshire words. Unfortunately he had never forgiven Izzy the fright her passion had caused him, and the two disliked each other so much that I should have feared for Polly's well-being, if Izzy had not stood in awe of him as something not canny, and therefore to remain untouched. Harry she adored; he repaying her devotion, I am sorry to say, with a very slighting contempt, and showing much vexation with me when the child accompanied us on our rambles.

Molly's great desire for letters set me thinking one day whether we could not get down to Bickleigh. Harry and I were very stout walkers, and if only we could find the way, it did not seem an impossible undertaking. He had a great many things to say against it, while setting his heart more strongly than I had done, and consented at last on condition of

telling no one, so that we should get no jeering if we failed, and of slipping out without Izzy running at our heels. I did tell Molly not to be frightened if we were late, and it went to my heart to escape from Izzy's wistful looks, but Harry was resolute.

So we set off on a morning that was fair, and felt for all the world like mariners without a compass when once we had got beyond the part with which we were familiar, so difficult was it to see any difference between one moor-track and another. The peat-bogs were not so plentiful in this direction as if we had been going upwards towards the central moor, and this was a great satisfaction to me who hated them. But, with the exception of the sheep that grazed on the short turf, there was the strangest loneliness around us, and no sign at all of human life. The most that we knew was that we must somehow find the Plym and cross it, and Harry felt sure that by going on we should get there, which seemed to me more doubtful, though I said nothing.

He was quite right. We had a good deal of walking first, and then got into a more sylvan region, and a most beautiful gorge, through which the river was foaming and whirling wildly. But even here, though

there was wood on one bank, the other was dark and jagged with granite until we reached the bridge and crossed it. And here there were more people moving, and we got directed on our way, and had pleasant walking, though much of it, before we got a glimpse of the grey spire of Bickleigh village.

'Twas a long stretch for two young things, and so the good woman at the post-office seemed to think. But what made it all seem easy to us was that there was a letter for Molly in Mrs. Harty's handwriting, brought, as the woman vowed, the day before, though I thought 'twas likely to have been there longer. We went to a house of which she told us, and had a glass of milk apiece and some food, which was most welcome, and the mistress of it told us that her husband was going to take his horse up in the direction of Shaugh Bridge, and if we could manage to sit on the pack-saddle we should be welcome to the lift. For myself, I think I could have sat on anything to rest my legs, and Harry, I know, was just as glad in his heart. So we paid our small reckoning and were put on the black horse, and rode a good way with much kindness from his master.

We went on very cheerily from the bridge, though

with more mounting than before. And we had no fear of not finding our way back, having once been along there; and I had Mrs. Harty's letter in my pocket. Harry and I were not quite of one mind as to the time when we should break away from the river, I thinking we should have gone further on. However, it did not seem of any great consequence, and there was a pleasant breeze springing up, which we had felt the want of before. But suddenly I saw something which made me think of John Coombes' warnings.

"Harry," I said quickly, "look behind. There's a fog coming up."

He looked and said nothing. But 'twas not for want of seeing, for the mist was rolling quickly onwards and blotting out what a few minutes before had been sharp outlines, and before we knew where we were, 'twas upon us and all round.

"Go straight as you were," said Harry sturdily.

I caught his coat and tried to do what he said, but 'twas quite extraordinary how soon one got bewildered as to where the straightness lay. It was but to turn your head ever so little, and your body somehow went after it, and then we bumped against a great granite

boulder, and Harry fell and I pulled him up, and this seemed to throw us altogether out of our reckoning. Such a fog John Coombes had told us of, with stories of a poor little shepherd-boy of his own who had been found dead on the moor, having wandered on and on, and still got farther from home; but we had never believed it could be so thick and so impenetrable, or thought much more of the story than of the older one of "Childe of Plymstock," who, lost on the moor, wrote with his own blood the couplet:—

> "The fyrste that fyndes and brings me to my grabe,
> The landes of Plymstoke they shall habe."

Yet now, though we had no such sad fears, the tales came back to our minds with so much force added to them, that they no longer seemed incredible, and the chill of the mist seemed to reach our bones more quickly than I could have thought possible. Harry would have it that by walking on we must come to some landmark which would show us our way, but I knew of none, and what at length disheartened us both was that I dropped a glove near a granite moor-stone, and that when we had been walking for near half-an-hour I came upon it again. 'Twas horrible to think of toiling round and round in a circle! I was inclined

to sit down on a stone and wait, but Harry would not hear of it as 'twas getting late, and darkness would be added soon to our difficulties; and to one thing I held quite constant, and that was the keeping close to him. We made up our minds that we might have to pass the night on the moor, which at this time of year would not be so serious a matter, providing the fog cleared off in the morning. But sometimes a fog would last for two or three days, and long before that time my endurance, I knew, would have come to an end. And what with the present exhaustion, and the thought of what Mother Molly and grandfather would be suffering, I would gladly have sat down and cried, but that 'twould have been a shame with Harry so steadfast.

But at last, when I had got so stupid with toiling on that my legs seemed to move as if they did not belong to me, I heard a little sound which was like water rushing, and we made our way as hastily as we could towards it. And when I saw it I cried out to Harry in a transport,—

"Oh, Harry, 'tis my brook!"

For I knew the golden-brown look of the water, and the way the stones lay, and just along the line of it

the fog had just lifted a little. And I hoped that by going up it we might come upon the place nearest the farm, where so long as it was daylight I could not mistake the stones. Of course, as Harry said, it might be down lower, but any way I hoped, and that revived me wonderfully. So we took off our shoes and stockings and began to wade. It was very cold, but we had not far to go before we came to the spot I wanted.

Even that piece between the brook and the farm took longer to cross than any one would have believed, but we went warily, having learnt caution, and got there at last. Mother Molly was standing at the door, and we saw her joy, and she said ever afterwards that we had never understood what she had suffered. John Coombes and a couple of men were out searching, though not in the least knowing in which quarter to look. Mother Molly comforted and cossetted us like herself—and indeed we stood in need of it—nor would she so much as look at Mrs. Harty's letter until we were safe in bed, and she sitting by me. It told her that things were very much as we had left them. "We are getting used, my dear, to having the French overlooking us," wrote my God-

mother, "and I verily believe shall miss them when they go. The fashion is to watch them from the Hoe, where I have even got myself in a sedan-chair, and to speculate whether they be nearer than the day before. Seriously, 'tis a wonderful favour of Providence which has kept us so far. 'There is none other that fighteth for us,' is true to the letter." The Copplestones had gone to Exeter. Dick was back and well, and had had the key and looked into our house.

This was Mrs. Harty's letter, and it lifted off some grave doubts. Only I could not get Molly to say she was glad to have it, because of the fog and our danger.

And one thing I noticed, Harry never again laughed at Nan's brook.

CHAPTER XIV.

IZZY AND HER MOTHER.

THERE was no doubting that—in spite of the hard fare—the bracing air of the moor and the delight of the flowers were doing grandfather good. He was at least as well as he had been before that day in Charles churchyard, and sometimes, Molly thought, better. He grew able to walk as far as my stream, and liked to sit in the wood and watch the squirrels, or to show us all the creatures that made their home in a hollow tree. There was not one of us that did not gain a quickened ear and a more watchful eye, by the time we had been for two or three weeks on the moor.

And how beautiful it was! What grand forms of

clouds would roll up and across the great wastes! To be sure, the end of it was often a violent thunder-storm; but even that, when 'twas not too near (and I could turn my mind from the remembrance of what had happened at Widdecombe a hundred years before, when the church was almost smitten to pieces by thunderbolts, and more than sixty people were injured), even that had a beauty of its own, in the purple masses and lurid lights against which the old tors stood unmoved, or the smoke from the peat-burning curled softly.

Izzy knew all the stories of the moor, and would tell them to me if she could be found in the mind for them. 'Twas she who had the Widdecombe history by heart, and about the man who was playing cards in his pew when the thunderbolt came and dashed him against the granite pillar. All the pixie tales I knew as well as she, having learnt them from Betty, but 'twas new to me to hear of the poor Cavalier who was hid in the pixie house near Sheepstor, and kept there safely till he could escape. And in return I told her all I knew about Plymouth siege, and the stout mayors who held the town, and promised her, if she was a good girl to Madge, I would give her a little book

This pleased her so mightily that I never doubted she could read till something showed me the contrary.

"Well, then," I said, "your mother can read it to you."

"She can't read neither," said Izzy, with great cheerfulness.

"Then who will teach you?"

"Nobody. But mother will learn me to spin."

I carried this straightway to Molly, who was as eager as I on the subject, and said she had been remiss not to have thought of it before, and went at once in pursuit of Mrs. Coombes.

She was standing near a heap of turf, which had been cut the day before, and brought back by Jack, and the short crooks which were used for that and for faggots. Thirza did the work of a man about the farm, and her most feminine occupation was spinning yarn. At this moment this was her employment, and old Shep, the dog, lay stretched by her side. As usual when she saw us, she moved away; but, Molly calling her, she stopped and faced us, keeping her eyes, however, fixed on the yarn.

"Nan and I are tired of being idle, Mrs. Coombes," said Molly brightly. "Will you let us teach little Izzy to read?"

She got no answer of any sort. Thirza stood as immovable as if she had not heard.

"We may not be here very long," urged Molly, "but there will be time enough to do something. And she is so quick, I am sure she will learn easily if she will only try."

"Izzy don't waant nothin' from you, miss," said the woman, sullenly, "not yer larnin' nor nothin'. Let her bide as she be."

The pretty bright colour on Molly's cheek grew into crimson, she being quite unused to have her kindnesses rejected. But she said no more than,—

"Don't you wish her to learn to read? 'Twill be easier for her now than later."

"What's her got to do wi' you?" cried Thirza, with a passionate gesture. "Her's my chile, and her was well content with her mawther till you comed. What's her to do with voine ways? An' now it's always runnin' after wan or t'other. A'm zick of et."

Izzy came rushing up at this moment, and her mother, as if wanting a vent for her anger, pushed her from her with violence. Betty, who had heard the loud voice, emerged from the house, with bits of

bread-dough sticking to her hands, and an eager air of enquiry.

"Whatever be talking about, Thirza?"

"A woan't have my Izzy made a voine lady," she said, still passionately.

"'Tweed take a dale o' makin'," said Betty, sarcastically. "Be that all?"

"I'm very sorry," said Molly in a low voice. "I did not believe 'twould make her a fine lady to learn to read. Please don't think so unkindly of us, Mrs. Coombes." And then she took my hand and drew me quietly away. Izzy ran after us, but Molly stopped her. "Go back to mother," she said, so decidedly that the child stood still and stared with her finger in her mouth.

Grandfather was in the kitchen, and we went there, and heard the two women's voices going loudly on. I was very angry with Thirza, and said,—

"She's a horrid woman!"

"No, Nan," said Molly sadly, "only a jealous one. The poor thing has but one love, and wants to shut it up tight in her heart."

Presently the voices died away. Grandfather got up and walked up and down, as was his custom some-

times. Then the two women came in, Betty first and Thirza following with her face pale.

"Thirza's sorry her spoked zo," said Betty briefly, and her sister-in-law took up the word, though keeping her eyes turned away from Molly.

"Her zays," she said, motioning with her hand, and speaking in a hard and strained tone, "that a'm my chile's worst enemy. A' doan't rightly knaw; but Izzy shan't niver zay et. Ef you'll larn her, miss, a'll thank 'ee."

Mother Molly looked at her and hesitated. I think there was something more she wanted to say, but waited for.

"If you like her to learn, we will do our best," she said gently. "Will you talk to her quietly about what we all wish, and persuade her to be a good girl?"

She glanced—for the first time—quickly at Moll, and nodded, with a gleam of light on her face. From what Molly had said, I suppose she thought we were all trying to separate her child from her, and a consciousness of her own deficiencies made her heart sore and angry. To be sure, such a design had never entered our heads, but it brought Mrs. Harty's hen to my mind.

But 'twas all very well for Moll to tell her to talk to Izzy. Izzy would pay no attention. The child had never been taught to restrain herself, or to do what she did not like. She came into the kitchen, peeped over my shoulder at the primer which had been brought for Madge's benefit, and then danced to the window to stick some flowers she had gathered into the panes. Her mother, half-triumphant, as I fancied, coaxed in vain. Betty called to her in anger to "let alone they davered old flowers," the culprit only fled outside the door. It was quite an unexpected ally which brought her back, a voice, not one of ours, which was heard saying, in grave and emphatic tones—

"Walk in, yu walk in, or I'll lirrup ee!"

The women stared at each other, Izzy came running in.

"However can he say it!" she cried breathlessly.

"He learnt it. Polly is wiser than you and learns his lessons," I said, with a catch at a moral of which I was very proud afterwards. The child put her finger into her mouth and stood thinking.

"You can learn me too," she said suddenly, sitting down on a little stool at Molly's side.

Her mother glanced at the two as I did. I was thinking how pretty our Moll was looking, with the fresh apple-blossom colour on her cheeks, and her eyes so good and sweet; but the woman must have had other thoughts in her head, for her hands were closely linked together, and there was quite a scowl on her brow, and she turned and went out as though she could not bear it. A little after, something took me towards the same door, but I paused, for though Betty was opening and slamming the doors of the oven, I heard a sound that was more like quick sobs than hard breathing. And it could only have been Thirza. There was no one else about the place. And later on, the door being half-closed, I saw a bit of blue stuff pushing through by the hinge, and was sure she had come there to hear the lesson. All this made me wonder, though I was angry and impatient with her, and of course when we had gone to bed—which was always early—I told Molly. She listened very attentively, and when I had finished, said, "Poor soul!" which I thought was more pity than she deserved. But Molly went on,—

"It makes me think more of what had already crossed my head. Perhaps she would like to learn

herself. What do you say, Nan? If you would teach Izzy, I would take her mother, and the poor thing might not have such a sore heart about strangers. Do you think it would do?"

It was difficult to say. She was not an inviting pupil, but I liked Molly to consult me, and I liked occupation, and so I agreed. Molly never told me what she said to Thirza or Thirza to her. All that I knew was that the lessons began, and that, once begun, the mother showed an almost passionate eagerness to learn, which was certainly not shared by the child. I doubt whether I ever had a better opportunity of getting or losing patience. Izzy was not dull, but a fly on the window-pane was enough to call off her attention, and it sometimes seemed as if she were absolutely deaf to reasoning. I think only two motives affected her—a rough affection for me, and a fear of Harry's contempt. And these carried her through her letters, but seemed to fail altogether when we got to Ba-bi-bo.

CHAPTER XV.

AMONG THE CLATTER.

IT was a strange isolation from the rest of the world in which we found ourselves on the moor, no news nor information of any sort of what was going on; nothing from America, no particulars of the terrible magazine explosion at Vienna, and above all, no tidings as to the fleets of France and Spain off Plymouth. 'Twould not have been impossible to have gained these tidings had John Coombes been another sort of man, for when the shortest way was known, there was Bickleigh not so far away, and letters, no doubt, waiting for Molly; but she had made us promise not to adventure there again, and John Coombes seemed to consider no news fit to stand in the way of

his summer work or the housing his scanty crops. Had it been otherwise, he might have walked to Boringdon Hill, and seen with his own eyes what the Channel had to tell. And at last, to our great joy, a man did call in who had passed by there, and by his account, though 'twas now the end of August, there were the ships just as we had left them, sometimes going off, but returning and menacing yet not seeking to enter the port. 'Twas most unaccountable.

The only change in our days came on Sunday. Then, when the weather permitted, as many of us as could walked down to Shaugh Church-town, helped by Jack, who was furnished with a pillion. And there sometimes a crumb of news would fall to Betty in the churchyard after the service, though nothing about what we most wanted to hear, what had become of Sir Charles Hardy's fleet and the "Invincible."

Excepting for this, I believe that Harry and Madge and I, and I may almost say grandfather, were as happy as the days were long. The moor air is meat and drink together, and life more wholesome than it could be in the town. Harry's round face was as brown as might be, and we were out for hours in the

day, learning the secrets of the moor, the cries of the birds, and the voices of other things which until then we never knew had voices at all. Mrs. Copplestone had fancied we should find it a savage and dreary place, whereas 'twas soon full of friends. Only we were obliged, after that foggy adventure, to say where we were going, or to keep with the turf-cutters, or to take little bare-footed Izzy as our guide, a concession which it was always hard for Harry to stomach. But she won her way, even with him, on these expeditions. She knew every inch of the ground for miles round, and when she understood we wanted flowers or insects, could show us the most likely places as cleverly as any trained naturalist. All the birds she knew, and the time of their coming and going, though she gave them strange names, which puzzled us. For bog-crossing, I never saw one so light or so clever in the way she sprang. She would go where neither of us dared venture, if there was a rare heath or something which I knew grandfather would like, and 'twas impossible to think there was more danger for her than for the birds themselves. And she had endless stories of the snows of winter, and the wild-fowl which come flying down from the north.

Harry had a liking, more than I, for the cairns and menhirs which lie scattered all about this country, more especially on the tors. I was as good a climber as he elsewhere, but the smooth slippery stones always went against me, and I hated to see him perched on the top of one, besides that I felt humiliated in not getting there myself. And he always would have it he could see so much from the top, more than was reasonably possible, considering the height.

'Twas for one of these cairns, of which he had heard from Betty, that we set out one day, he and I and Izzy. Molly, grandfather, and Madge started at the same time for the wood, where, so still was the day, we could hear the wood-pigeons, or, as Izzy called them, the culvers, cooing. We carried jumping-poles, having bogs to cross, but they were mostly those we had been over before, and knew pretty well.

All the same, I know Molly never saw us go without a qualm.

For a wonder the sky was a clear and steady blue, with only a few dazzling clouds down towards the south. 'Twas most beautiful to watch the great sweep of the hills, with their soft rich colouring, owing to the peat and the masses of heather, and the green of the

ferns kept tender with much moisture. And Izzy had the delight of baffling a stoat which would have had a rabbit but for her interference, which set her in the highest of spirits. We went up and down, for that is the feature of our moors, which have dips and vales in them, and running streams, and a constant change, and we crossed a couple of bogs, and marked some fine bog-asphodel still in flower, which we resolved to get for grandfather on our way back, and all this while had seen no one except one man riding a pony in the distance. 'Twas like a vast playground, all our own, except for the birds and beasts, with which none of us would have parted.

But climbing at length over a ridge of hill, I stood still with amazement to see such a strange dwelling which seemed as if it must have been fitted for some of the pixie race rather than ours. It was a little shanty made of turf, built roughly up from the ground, with a hole from which the blue smoke was curling, and not much besides to mark it as a human habitation. Round it was a potato-plot, carefully weeded and hoed, and a goat was tethered on the moor at a little distance. Izzy put up her finger, and made a sign to us that we were to pass by as quietly as we could.

"He don't like to have folk about."

"He? Who's he?"

"Him that lives in there. Now, run."

We obeyed this direction by running past until we were breathless, as if it were the lair of some wild beast which might be expected to pounce out upon us as we fled by.

"Mother thinks he's one of the Old Men come again," said Izzy panting.

We knew who were meant by the Old Men—the ancient inhabitants of the moor, the remains of whose dwellings are to be found in the hut circles which may be traced in many directions, and are thickly set with old traditionary stories. Harry turned up his nose at the notion; but all the same, there was something very mysterious in this strange dweller in the solitudes, and we stood still and watched for some time with the hope that he would appear at the low hole which served him for doorway.

"He never comes out," said little Izzy, with a sigh of disappointment, "only by night."

"Then he'd get stogged," said Harry, the matter-of-fact.

Izzy shook her head.

"*He* won't never be stogged," she said significantly. "Let's run down here, there's a plashet at the bottom."

We were in the wildest spirits, nothing came amiss to us, and the black bread I had brought, with a bottle of milk, seemed delicious. We left crumbs behind us for the birds.

"Dear little things!" Izzy said, "they can't never have tasted it before. I shall give them a good piece."

And when once this idea had got into her head, I had some difficulty in persuading the child to eat anything herself.

Presently we saw before us the tor on which were the stones which Harry was seeking, and began to climb more steadily towards them between the heather and ferns which lay around us for miles. As we got near, the stones seemed to take strange fantastic shapes, crowning the height as they did, and thrown out by the soft blue sky behind them, and 'twas not difficult to fancy some of the old stories true. There was plenty of green whortle about, but not yet ripened, which we felt to be hard.

Harry gave a whoop of delight when he got up to

the stones, which seemed to me the least part of it all. There was a quantity of clatter—as they call the loose stones—underneath, and then two or three granite blocks heaped on each other, and a logan stone which might have cracked nuts for us if we had had them to crack. As far as the eye could see, the hills swept on and on, reaching into blue distances, and with that strange loveliness and silence which hangs round them.

With the stones before him 'twas needful, of course, that Harry should be on their top as soon as possible, and crying out that the view up there was worth ever so much more, and that he was sure he could make out where Plymouth Sound must be, which was almost as good as seeing it, and made me long to shake him. The name of the place seemed to set Izzy in one of her moods, which came sometimes without our knowing why. She stood with her finger in her mouth, frowning, and pushing one shoulder up from her coarse frock; and Harry, who thought nothing of it, but loved to tease, began to mock her with never having seen more water than filled the Black Pond. This pulled her the wrong way more than ever, for she could never bear being laughed at,

and she scowled at him, and would have flung a stone but that I took it from her. She stood quiet then, and I thought 'twould be over in a minute, for these passions of hers never lasted, but the next instant she had sprung up towards him and caught his foot and dragged him down upon her. He was sitting idly across the top stone with his legs dangling, and, never dreaming of such an attack, was quite unprepared for it. The two rolled down together upon the clatter, which gave them a hard reception, and there was a scream from Izzy, which told that she at least was hurt.

All had passed so quickly that I had scarcely time to start forward before they were down, and 'twas a most dreadful moment while they both lay still, and I saw the blood streaming from Harry's forehead. I rushed at him the first, and got his head on my knee, and pressed my handkerchief on the wound, and called to him to speak, for he was white and motionless. But in a minute or two he lifted his hand, and turned his head, and I tied the handkerchief round, and laid him down where he was, for there was a little shade from the stones, and went to pick up the child, hoping that Harry was coming to himself.

But to move her was beyond my power, she cried out so sharply when she was touched. I was not sure whether all her bones might not be broken, and was dreadfully conscious that I was helpless, and terrified lest Harry might bleed to death while I was minding her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRANGER.

IT soon became evident that, in this case, the aggressor had suffered the most, for Harry's hurts resolved themselves into bruises and the cut on his head, and he was quite sure he had no bones broken, and would not let me feel him all over, which I was anxious to do. But with Izzy things were different. When I tried to lift her up she screamed, so that I was certain something serious was the matter, but how to mend it or what to do I could not think. Here we were on the top of a solitary tor, miles from home and help, and though I thought myself strong enough to carry the child, I was afraid to touch her for fear of ignorantly increasing the hurt. I hoped 'twas her leg that was injured, and not worse; and

Harry gave me a little comfort by saying he was sure 'twas a good sign that she cried out so loud. But for him, poor fellow, water was sadly needed to staunch the bleeding, and the only plan I could at first devise was to go and fetch some, and then to trust that he would be able to help me with Izzy.

So we took off his coat and folded it as soft as we could for the child's head, and then I ran as fast as I could down the hill, remembering a little stream we had passed, and having the bottle with me. And it was as I ran, turning over all sorts of ideas, that the turf shanty jumped into my head.

At first it did not seem to me as if I could venture to go there. Of course I did not believe Izzy's stories of his being one of the Old Men come to life again, but there was no doubt that there was something mysterious about a being who had chosen such a solitary home, and never allowed himself to be seen of men. I trembled at the bare thought of approaching his door. I felt as if I could have endured anything myself sooner than ask his help.

But when I thought of poor little Izzy's piteous pain-stricken face, and of the long hours that at best would have to pass before we got her home, and of

Harry's unfitness to help me, I felt desperate, and determined to make my way to the hut. I knew that Harry would be able to keep me in view pretty well till I got to the stream, and though I feared 'twould disappoint him sadly to see me not return at once with the water, I hoped that by my waving and pointing—as I did—he would understand that I had an eye to further help, and was gone to seek it. But now that I was quite alone, and at length out of view of the cairn, the solitude which, with one or two others to share it, had been so delightful, seemed most horrible, and I think I grew more frightened of the man who had chosen it, and longed to run back again. Perhaps it was lucky that I had one or two bogs to cross, and these took my attention in a wholesomer fashion.

I saw the smoke before I saw the hut, and climbed more slowly up the next hill, and when I got to the top stood quite still like a simpleton. 'Twas a very little thing which gave me courage, only the goat looking up and bleating. But at any rate she was a living creature, and the man, whoever he was, must tend her, and I choked down my fears and walked straight to the hut, as I thought Father, if he knew,

would have me do. And when I got to the hole where the door should have been, but which was so low that no one could have got in or out except on hands and knees, I said as loud as I could get the voice for, "Please, is any one here?" and then waited in terror.

I heard something moving, but got no answer, and my heart thumped so fast that I grew quite dizzy. Go in I could not. That would have been beyond my powers, but I drew a long breath, and called again as loud as was possible, "Is any one here? There's a child hurt."

A voice replied at once, "I am coming," and a man's head and shoulders emerged from the hole, and drawing himself out on his hands, a tall large man with a thick chestnut-coloured beard, and keen eyes, stood upright and looked questioningly at me.

I stared at him in amazement, because he was so different from what I expected, and so big; but all my fear was gone, and I hurriedly explained what had happened.

"You are only children, and have no one to help you?" he asked.

"No one at all, sir."

"A MAN'S HEAD AND SHOULDERS EMERGED FROM THE HOLE."

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He muttered something, I don't know what it was, and then bid me go back at once, and he would fetch some things that might be needed, and follow, which sounded so comfortable and like other human beings, that I had no sooner got away than I could not keep myself from a great laugh, which, as it turned out, was most silly of me, for I never heard his step behind me, and when he overtook me there was I like a Merry Andrew on the broad grin. My mirth ended abruptly, for I never saw a face change to such sudden anger. The fire seemed to leap from his eyes, and he caught my wrist in his grasp, and held it like a vice. It seemed what he thought was that we were playing off a jest upon him, and that I had been sent with a false tale just to draw him out to be looked at. I felt much ashamed, and could do nothing but tell him all the truth: how scared I had been at first, not knowing what I might see, and then so much relieved that I could not keep myself from laughing, for which I begged his pardon. And I suppose he believed me, for he dropped my hand, and walked on with such great strides that 'twas all and more than I could do to keep up with him.

I took glances at him when I could civilly do so,

and saw he was an older man than I had first supposed, and that there was grey in his hair and beard. If it had not been for the beard, which looked most strange, there was nothing so ill about him. His clothes were oddly cut and old-fashioned, it was true, but he had the air of a gentleman, and he neither did nor said anything which could terrify me after that first minute. He spoke very seldom, and it startled me afterwards to remember how soon I had told him everything about ourselves, and the panic at Plymouth, and our flight, and how much we wanted news of Father's ship, and how Dick was in the Volunteers. I thought I must have been forward to have let out so much, but I believe now that he drew it from me with a design, and that for all he had shut himself out from his kind, he could not kill the human interest in his heart, and jumped at this opportunity of learning a little as to what was happening.

As we went along, I noticed that he stooped to gather some little plant or a leaf or two from it, and, seeing me look, he told me that this one was good for bruises and that for inflammation, and, finding I had learnt a little of flowers from grandfather, showed me

one or two others and explained, though briefly, their uses.

By this time we had got within sight of the cairn, and it gave me a most dreadful turn that I could see nothing whatever of the two children. I stopped with a cry, and he asked me what was the matter. He said directly:

"One is lying down, and the other is sitting in a cleft of the stones, sideways." I could not believe him, and was very uneasy, till he went on, "He is moving now; in a moment you will see him."

It must have been long acquaintance with the moor which made his sight so extraordinary, for it was quite true, and it lifted a load from my heart to see Harry's arm moving up and down with a feeble attempt at welcome. The bottle had been filled at a little stream, and I could imagine how the poor boy had been looking and longing and wondering what had taken me all this while. It was never his way to say much, and when we got up, though he stared at the stranger, he drank the water, and asked no questions. 'Twas little Izzy that took my companion's attention. She was lying pretty much as I had left her, moaning a little, but greatly exhausted with pain,

so that 'twas really a piteous thing to look at the child, generally so bright. I expected the sight of the strange man would have made her scream, but it did not, and indeed, he touched her as gently as any woman could have done, though with firmness, and without speaking a word. I saw that above the ankle was very much swelled, and, after he had been feeling there some time, he came and looked at Harry, and bid me take him off a yard or two, and wash the cut, and lay on it some leaves he gave me, and bind it up. While I was doing this, Izzy gave such a cry that I ran round.

"She will be easier," he said briefly.

'Twas wonderful to see the lightness of his touch as he laid the cooling plants, and bound it round, and fastened some flat sticks on either side with plaited rushes, which he had brought with him. And then he poured a few drops of cordial into her mouth, and the change in the child's condition was extraordinary. She watched him with her great eyes, without showing any fear when he took her in his arms and bid us follow.

He kept before us all the way, at some little distance, looking round now and then to see if we

were safe, and carrying Izzy as if she had been a feather, which did not surprise me, for he had a great appearance of strength. I do believe that Harry was amazed to hear who he was—that is, the dweller in the turf hut, for we knew no more—and that I should have summoned courage to seek his help. But by this time the only wonder was that I should have dreaded it so much, and expected some one so different to rush out at me!

The way he led us did not pass close to his hut, which disappointed us, for I think we both had hopes he might have invited us to see what 'twas like, and our curiosity was reaching a burning height now that there was less fear to temper it. At the same time 'twas getting towards evening, grey clouds were sweeping rapidly across the moor, and the wind had risen high, so that I knew they would be looking for us, and that we should lose no more time on the way than we could help, besides that Harry's head was aching with its hard thump. He and I had plenty of fancies about the stranger, and why he had buried himself in the heart of the moor. He would have it he had lost all his money, and I that he had been crossed in love; but there was one good thing in the making up of our

stories, that they beguiled the way for Harry, and took his thoughts off the pain, so that he got hungry under the thinking about them, which seemed to me a most excellent sign.

As I have said, we were led back by a way which was a little different, and it kept us longer out of the sight of our farm than if we had gone straight over the crest of the hill, but when the next rise would have brought us into view of it, our guide stood still and beckoned to us to hurry. When I came up, he placed Izzy very carefully in my arms.

"You can carry the child the rest of the way," he said. "Tell the mother that a bone has been broken in the leg, to apply decoctions of the plant I showed you, and to keep it very carefully bandaged."

"But, sir," I said, "should there not be a doctor to set it, if 'tis broken?"

"I have set it. Follow those directions, and see that the child is quiet. That is all."

And before I had had time to thank him, or to ask one of the questions on the tip of my tongue, he was walking back with the long strides which it was impossible to think of overtaking.

I could have cried. Perhaps I should, if there had

not been something else to do, and Izzy in my arms, resting not half so quietly as she had done with him, and the farm so near, where her mother would be sure to go almost wild when she knew what had happened. I sent on Harry, thinking his bandaged head would be something of a preparation for them, and walked gently after, myself, trying not to shake her more than I could help.

Harry, who was getting very mannerless, said afterwards that the women came flying out like a flock of crows. I know I was very glad to see them, and so was he, if he would have owned it, and I am sure it was well both Betty and Mother Molly were there, for they kept back Thirza when she would have snatched the child from me. And when she heard what was done, and how all depended upon care, she grew quite meek and submissive, though one could see her heart heaving up and down, and her hands knitted. Betty ran in to get the bed ready, charging her sister-in-law to leave her in my arms until I had carried her up; and she said nothing against it, but seemed to put a strong force upon herself. But when I had laid her down, and Mother Molly had got Harry, and Betty and I slipped out of the room, we heard her

pulling something against the door, so that we should not get in again, and Betty held up her hands.

"Didn' think her'd ha' ben so vulish! An' now, Miss Nan, yu let me know the rights o't."

When I had told our adventures, with great wondering and some reproaches on Betty's part, for she was one of those who think a little blame belongs only properly to a misfortune, she was very desirous to go and urge on Thirza the necessity of leaving the bandages undisturbed, and of carrying out all the stranger's directions to the letter. But I found this anxiety arose not so much from confidence in his surgical powers, as from her conviction that he had said a charm over Izzy's leg, which might be baffled by any failure in obedience. Evidently she thought that if Izzy was to break her bones, the favour of one, who if not an Old Man, was at least a wizard, must be of untold advantage, and she gave me great credit for my valour in obtaining it for her. She went off armed with her news to Thirza, and came back in great glee to say she was sure the swelling had already gone down. This seemed to me hardly likely, but Betty reproved me by saying she didn't think much of faith that couldn't put down an "information." The

whole household appeared to derive great satisfaction from learning who had been the surgeon, and to have no doubt that all must go on well, so long as his directions were not crossed, and when grandfather, who had been a good deal shocked at finding what was the reason for this confidence, argued mildly against it that evening with John Coombes, John scratched his head, said 'twas the women's business, and turned the subject with most unlooked for quickness.

CHAPTER XVII.

LETTERS, BUT NO NEWS.

WHATEVER was the reason, certainly nothing could have mended better than the broken leg. The child suffered very little pain, and was soon in the highest spirits. Her mother would very gladly have shut us all out of the room, but Izzy had no notion of this, and cried till one of us was sent for. Not Harry. She never asked for him, and I had an idea that she still kept the anger against him which had caused her accident, but Mother Molly thought 'twas more likely shame. Molly indeed was unhappy about the little creature and these violent fits of passion, and tried to talk both to her and her mother, but it was difficult, because Thirza resented anything which sounded like blame of Izzy, and Molly was

young herself, and felt it, and did not like to seem to interfere.

But, for one thing, Izzy now was glad of her lessons and took them as a change in the day, so that we got on faster, and she began to be proud of her progress, and to like Molly to tell her stories. We fetched the parrot up to her room, by day, and she would lie and laugh till she was red in the face with the way he went on coughing, so that Betty came up once to ask where John was, for she'd know his hoast anywhere; sneezing, laughing, cackling, barking—there never was such a bird for picking up what he heard! Thirza could not bear him, I am sure she thought there was something not right about the way he could mimic, but then he was a great amusement for Izzy, and that was enough for her. She worked with a sort of dogged perseverance at her reading, and Molly's patience and brightness seemed to have got some hold upon her, for she looked differently at her, and did not keep out of sight as she had done before.

Poor Mother Molly! 'Twas well she had some little thing to cheer her, and that she had never been one to sit down and brood over her own troubles, for otherwise 'twould have been very hard on her to be

patient and bright. Here was September come, and she yearning for news of George, and with her heart dragged towards Plymouth, from which a hundred miles might have separated us, for all we heard of it. I begged and prayed her to let Harry and me go down to Bickleigh again, but she would not. She said, laughing, that she would not let us out of her sight any more, and that she meant to be in the next adventure herself. And we little thought how true her words would be! But, as I was saying, she would not hear of our going to Bickleigh, and it was too great a distance for her to walk, and John Coombes was always saying one of the men would have to go before long, and at last Betty whipped on her cloak and hood one morning, and was off before any of us were up. How Molly's spirits rose! She would not be satisfied without doing Betty's work, and burnt her hand in the baking, but carried it through merrily. She made grandfather listen while she repeated Mr. Whitehead's odes, which were in everybody's mouth at that time, and now seem to have faded quite out of memory. I know we thought them most beautiful,—

"To arms, to arms, ye sons of might,
And hail, with sounds of war, the new born-year!

Britannia, from her rocky height,
Points to the Gallic coast, and lifts her spear.
The immortal hatred, which by turns
Wakes and sleeps, with fury burns:
New cause of just offence has Albion found,
And lo! it bleeds afresh, the eternal wound!"

But grandfather shook his head.

"My dear, I like not immortal hates nor yet eternal wounds," he said in his quiet way.

"But 'tis poetry, sir," said Molly, with a smile.

"Is it?" he said doubtfully. "Well, 'tis not the poetry to which I have been used. And though war and bloodshed are not the subjects to bring the finest thoughts from a man, yet even of them I have known verses which would put that poor stuff to shame."

And he repeated, with his blue eye kindling, Milton's noble sonnet on the "Massacre in Piedmont."

"But I thank you, my dear, all the same," he said, laying his hand gently on our Moll's. "You have a good memory and a pleasant voice."

He was always fearful of hurting us, was grandfather.

It was Harry who first saw Betty coming toiling stiffly along—her great blue umbrella, with its whalebone ribs, tucked under her arm—and ran to tell Molly, as had been settled between us. She flew out,

and waved her letters in triumph, for there were two, and I am sure she was ready to hug Betty. We would have let her stay by herself, but she would not have it; she called us into the kitchen where grandfather was, and sat down beside him on a little stool, and opened first Mrs. Copplestone's great sheet, out of which fell a little bit for me from Elizabeth, and read with an eager light in her eyes. Harry rested both his elbows on the table, and I stood leaning against the settle, and each of us was longing for some news of Father's ship, and yet ready to be jealous if the Copplestones got it instead of us.

But they had none. Mrs. Copplestone said it one of the first things, guessing I daresay what we should be expecting. The whereabouts of Sir Charles Hardy's fleet was altogether a matter of conjecture, though there was some thought that they were trying to draw off the French and Spanish squadrons, being too few in number to venture an absolute attack; but nothing was really known, so it appeared we had not lost much by being on Dartmoor. But Mrs. Copplestone pitied us with all her power, and Molly seemed to think it most good and kind of her. Exeter was really a pleasant place, and their house in Paul Street

all that could be desired. The Volunteers were out and gave it a great deal of life, having charge of the thirteen hundred prisoners of war who were stowed in the Bridewell, and then she gave us a long list of the names of those gentlemen who had supped with them. The new bridge over the Exe was an extraordinary improvement. Mary and Elizabeth had lessons on the harpsichord, she having always been in favour of giving them the best instruction. She hoped Nan and Harry were not running quite wild, and that Nan remembered not to poke. Molly should recollect that freckles once established were most hard to get rid of, and she enclosed a recipe.

Elizabeth's note had nothing very different in it, except that she gave me a description of Exeter, the long hilly street running throughout, the ancient gates, the old castle, and the grandeur of the Cathedral, the singing-men of which were famous. And she told me that she should never forget their drive from Plymouth, or the terror they were in as to robbers as they drove across Haldon. She should have many things to tell me of, she said, when she saw me again, and supposed I might have some wonderful adventures on my side.

Mrs. Harty's letter had many messages in it from

Dick. She wrote with a great sense of thankfulness that so far they had been preserved, not, it is true, from the fear, but from the power of the enemy; and now they could not but hope that, with the likelihood of the equinoctial storms coming on, they might be left altogether. She could fancy how brown and healthy we had grown by this time, and often looked towards the moor and thought of and longed to see us, but was truly glad to think of us safely sheltered there, for the panic and uproar at Plymouth would have been most disturbing to grandfather. Directly it was possible for us to return, Dick would come and fetch us.

Molly's mind was but half set at ease by these letters, which wanted the special news she was hoping for, but still, so far as they went, they were good; and she always gladly took the brightness of things. As for me, it seemed to me as if our stay might come to an end any day, and there was so much not yet done, and I still felt a longing to carry back a bigger adventure to Mary and Elizabeth. We had never yet been up Dewerstone rock where the ravens were, and even, so 'twas whispered, where a pair of golden eagles had raised their young.

Something else was troubling me, and it troubled Molly also a little. It seemed ungracious towards the strange man who had done so much for little Izzy, never to have given him a word of thanks. When I said this to Betty, she looked mighty mysterious, and said *they* never liked to be thanked, and begged me not to go meddling, for I might set everything crooked. So 'twas evident I should get no help in this quarter.

Molly fancied that very likely he was not so mysterious as people made out. Very few passed by that way, and she thought he might wander about a good deal without many seeing him, and I am sure he seemed too long and too big to spend his days crouched up as was popularly reported. But whatever cause had sent him there, whether disappointment, or loss, or bitterness of spirit, it was sure to be something sad and sorrowful, and made her unwilling that we should add a pang by what might look like ingratitude. She tried to work up John Coombes to going, and taking him a little present, but you might as well have tried to move Pen Beacon. *He* didn't know how his little maid comed to break her leg at all. 'Twarn't a bit like her. Happen, somebody had overlooked

her in passin'. Happen, the same thing would fall out for hisself, if he mixed hisself up with them as didn't want him. And he'd got taties to dig. Leave they sort of folks aloan was his counsel, and give 'em plenty of room in passin'. And in fact, out in those solitary places there is held a very earthy doctrine of indifference which resents any demand for what does not directly affect people's own interests. At any rate, John Coombes opposed a stolid resistance to having anything to do with the dweller in the turf hut, so that at last Mother Molly consented one fine morning, when there seemed no fear of fog, and when she had extracted a solemn promise from us to avoid all stones whatever, and all unnecessary bogs, that Harry and I should go to the hut and carry a cheese as a little offering of gratitude. Thirza was very ready to send the cheese, in spite of Betty's mysterious warnings. I think to her there was a certain sweetness in having her child more dependent on her than she had been of late, and she had lost her angry fear of Molly, and was getting won.

So we set off, with a good deal of importance in our errand, on one of those days when the shadows pass swiftly across the moors, and seem in some strange

way to take off something of the solitude of the place. And here and there, where we looked back, we could see in the distance the reapers reaping the scanty plots of corn, and the sheep, just moving dots of white upon the hills, and dips of purple shadows showing the growth of trees. Harry dropped the cheese so often that I took it altogether at last, which I think he had in his mind, and then what did I do but let it slip between my fingers in a bog, just as I was jumping! It gave me a great fright, but most happily was caught by a tussock of heather. The little hut looked quite deserted and quiet when we got there, no smoke even coming out from it, and only the goat nibbling busily, and we stopped to consult what we should do.

Harry thought I might do just what I had done before, go near and call. So, my fear being very much smaller, I did so, and waited hopefully, remembering I had no answer that time just at first. But we could not hear the smallest sound within, and all our calling brought no answer whatever. Then Harry wanted to go in boldly, but that I could not bear. For I thought, and think still, that there was no one in the hut, and it would have been a great

piece of presumption on our parts to invade it, and certainly no way of showing our gratitude. So I sat down on the ground and made the cheese a table, and wrote on a piece of paper I had brought, "*Little Izzy's leg is doing finely, and her mother sends you a cheese with her grateful thanks*," and then we put the cheese just before the door-hole, and stuck the writing under it, so that it should not blow away, and went and patted the goat, and walked away, looking behind us a good deal, and perhaps half expecting to see the cheese drawn in by a long arm. But it was not. As far as we could see it at all, there it was a dot against the turf, and we could only speculate as to how the present would be received. We never saw him again, but I may as well mention here all that was known of him, for Izzy, when she got well, went up to his hut, and grew quite familiar there. I suppose he could not shut out a child, especially a child like her, and afterwards, when he got ill, they brought him down to the farm, and Thirza nursed him very tenderly till he died. Nothing was ever exactly known of his history, but after his death there was found near his heart a girl's portrait with a name and a date, and this lies in his grave with him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UP DEWERSTONE ROCK.

"Adoun the rock small runlets wept,
And reckless ivies leaned and crept,
And little spots of sunshine slept
On its brown steeps and made them fair."

JEAN INGELOW.

FOR a few days everything went on in the quietest way at the moor farm. Harry was seized with a sudden love for going off with Jack and John Coombes and staying out all day, so that we could have no more rambles together. And as Mother Molly was absolutely inflexible as to not letting me go by myself to any distance, I had to content myself with the wood and my stream, and was able to extract a good deal of amusement out of both. Grandfather had read in some book that in this neighbourhood

the rosy thyme thread-moss had been observed in fruit, so I was always spying out for that one thing. And there were too many squirrels in the wood for one ever to feel lonely, and besides 'twas a great delight to Madge to go there with me. I did wish we could have got a squirrel tame. Their fun and brightness, and the way they will chatter at you, is quite irresistible, but they never seem to come any nearer being friends.

I hoped we should be up at the farm when the time of storms arrived, and the heavy rains. For then they said my little stream was turned into a furious torrent, and came leaping and rushing along with a force for which no one who had not seen it would have given it credit. The worst time was after the melting of the snows on the higher land, but there was little chance of our seeing it then.

Meanwhile the great ambition of my life was to go up Dewerstone Rock: not that I thought of it as offering any particular difficulty, but that it was a feature in the neighbourhood, which we had all seen in the distance, and had heard was beautiful; and then there was that inducement of the eagles. I could not think how it was that Harry had not got up

there long before, but I believe he kept putting it off, and that some days it slipped his memory, and then that he was seized with this sudden affection for Jack and his pack-saddle. And, as he now said nothing about it, it seemed as if it might make rather a good little expedition for Molly and me one of these days. She had had but few of these expeditions, and this would be a nice one, not beyond her powers. And if—if—if we could bring home a report of the eagles!

Molly was not averse to my plan. Dear me, she was not so much older than I, that she should not enjoy a small adventure quite as well as I did! It was only that there was always somebody to take care of, or something that had to be done, which kept her at home when we were out on the frolic, and so now we began talking it over one day as we stood at the gate of the little plot of garden ground behind the house, watching a thunderstorm on its way. It was a strange effect, I recollect, for all the country was bathed in sunshine and stillness except where a deep purple cloud with distracted shreds of white flying beneath, and edged with constant flashes of forked lightning, came over our highest hill—but those sort of effects were by no means uncommon on the moor.

"Then you will go, Moll?" I was asking.

"Yes, I really will. If I don't do something of the sort, I shall feel most dreadfully commonplace when I get back to Plymouth. I think 'twill be a charming thing for you and me to manage."

"And when? To-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. To-morrow is Betty's busy day, and she will not be able to see to Madge. It shall be Monday. But, Nan, Harry must go, if he wishes it."

"Well," I said doubtfully. "But I hope he'll not wish it."

My hope was effectual. Harry said, with rather an air, that 'twas a good sort of place for girls to go to, no doubt, but that he liked being with the men, and seeing a day's work done. And that he had quite made up his mind to be a farmer when he grew up, which shocked us all, 'twas so different from anything that had ever been thought of. I am not certain that John Coombes quite took in what we intended. He was so much occupied with saving the little wheat he had—corn being terribly scarce—that his head seemed to have no room for anything else, and we sometimes thought he must have counted the very ears. Neither

Betty nor Thirza had ever been there, but they had heard of it as a wild place, and could not think what should make us wish to go there.

On the Sunday there were such storms of rain, that it was quite impossible to get to Shaugh Prior church, and Betty was particularly disappointed because some young farmer, of whom she talked to us a good deal, was to play the flute in the choir for the first time, and she seemed to think he might be bashful, or, as she expressed it, dashed, and that her presence might have afforded him some confidence. He not only, however, got over it, but came up in the evening, very red in the face, apparently to see Betty, but not to speak to her, for he only talked to John Coombes, and of nothing more interesting than pigs. I took quite a dislike to him. Molly asked him at last whether he had heard any news, upon which he got redder still, and ducked his head, and said he believed there was a talk of some, but he couldn't exactly say what it might be. There was some sort of disturbance down to Plymouth, that he knew. If it had been anybody else, I knew Betty would have called him a "girt gumphead," so I thought it odd of her to be vexed with me for saying how stupid I thought him.

Some sort of disturbance, and not to know what it was, being a man, and having legs!

The freshness of the next day was quite beautiful after the rain. I don't think Molly and I could have chosen anything nicer if we had had the picking of all the year. And there was nothing to prevent our starting directly after the twelve o'clock dinner. Izzy was sitting up in her bed, playing with Madge's doll. I am afraid her play was apt to be violent, but Madge was a generous-hearted little creature that never begrudged her playthings. We could hear the parrot downstairs bawling some of the Plymouth cries, "Chairs to mend!" "Knives to grind!" "Buy a broom!" "Vraish veesh! Hook an' line whiting! vraish veesh!" and a dozen others.

Grandfather walked a little way with us, and charged me much about the moss, which he was very anxious to have to take with him to Plymouth, and then he turned back, and Molly and I strolled gently on arm-in-arm to Cadaford Bridge.

After the heavy rains of the day before, the river dashed very prettily beneath it, and I, having always loved water better than anything else in God's world, found myself loth to leave. But our way lay by its

side, and most beautiful the course of it became, the wooded and wild banks contrasting so greatly, and between them this rushing torrent. 'Twas not very long, though we did not hurry, before we came upon the rock, rising much straighter out of the bed of the river than anything we had fancied. To us it seemed more like a huge building of human masonry than the mere granite rock it was, the slabs being piled one upon another with what had altogether the air of design, though indeed it was as if giants had been both the architects and the destroyers, large rents and fissures being visible even from below. The great beauty and enticement of the rock lay in the growth of clambering things which waved about it. Traveller's joy flung itself down in the wildest profusion, ivy clung tight to the stones and knotted one to another, here and there sprang out a mountain-ash with burning berries. Of all delightful places for climbing, Dewerstone Rock looked the most perfect, and I eyed it with longing, and so, I think, did Molly.

"But we will not go up to the very top at first, Nan," said she. "They do not expect us till late, and we have the afternoon before us. Let us climb

to some nice bit, where we can sit and chat and have the river under our feet."

I yielded with a little sigh, having always in such places an almost irresistible impulse to get at once to the top. But we found a pleasant niche to which we clambered with little difficulty, and then Molly began to talk about what lay nearest her heart.

I had never yet got quite used to the idea of her marrying George Copplestone. I thought she might just as well have gone on being friends with him, as we all were, and she was never one to talk much of her own feelings. But now, as for almost the first time she began to speak of him, 'twas impossible not to see but that there was something different. The happiest girl in the world, she called herself, to have won the love of so good a man. Why, I am not sure that she even considered Father his superior, and I had always thought of George as one of ourselves, only a little older! As for comparing him with Father—I should as soon have dreamt of comparing Dick. Why, Father was two inches taller, and had a most noble forehead, and blue eyes, and a straight nose, and a mouth that was both kind and determined, and George himself always looked up to him as much

as any of us. If Molly really put the two together, it showed there must be something in it more than I could understand, and I gave it up in despair. But I took the occasion to ask her whether she would like to have Mrs. Copplestone for her mother-in-law, and found she quite wished for it. She said she had felt her own youth and inexperience so greatly that it would be the greatest happiness to her to have some one to advise her.

I said I thought there was some advice which made one wish to go against it.

"But not if 'tis given by one who loves you," said Molly, looking earnestly at me. "Mrs. Copplestone has a real regard for us all, dear Nan. Only see how valuable her counsel was about M. de Lantenac. If she had not been clear-sighted and warned me, I might never have suspected him."

"Well, she misdoubted you, and was very unkind," I persisted.

"I had forgotten that," said Molly simply. "'Twas a very small misunderstanding, and soon set right. Sure, Nan, you would not let such a trifle as that come between you and a true friendship?"

"I think she is always interfering with you," I mur-

mured. I was ashamed to say "with us," but it would have been more exact.

Molly looked at me with a troubled face.

"But that is her kindness," she said. "She would not do it unless she cared. Oh, Nan, I sometimes think that in all Plymouth there are none that want friends more than we do, and 'twould be folly indeed to be vexed with those that try to help us!"

That was Molly all over, and the difference between us made me feel a little ashamed even then: now, as I look back, I can see yet more clearly how rare was that simple humility of hers which kept her from taking offence when I was up in arms, and ready to strike out on this side and that.

Well, we sat a little longer, just to wonder what the news could be that Betty's young farmer was so contented not to know. Whether at last the French had ventured in, or whether they had drawn off, or whether there had been an engagement, and if so, what was the end of it.

"I should like to make him walk to Plymouth, with a pig under each arm, just to find out," I said, crossly.

"He might take them as a present to Mrs. Harty.

'Tis the only kind that we shall be able to carry her," said Molly laughing. "How I wish she were here with us at this minute! I don't think there can be another place so nice. Just see how the water swirls, and, there—there is a great hawk over head! *Must* we go to the top?"

"For shame, Moll!" I cried, jumping up. "Why did we come here? And have you forgotten all about the eagles?"

"Oh, no, I have not forgotten," she said, clambering after me, "but I hoped you had."

She was only in fun, for she enjoyed the climb as much as I, though it was not an easy one. We were both sure-footed, I more so, perhaps, than most, and a sure foot and a steady head were needed, the rock was so perpendicular, and the great cracks in it so extraordinary. If they had been always visible the difficulty would not have been half as great, but the ivy and clematis and briar-roses had matted themselves together so thickly, that often 'twas hard to see that under them was a gaping fissure. Still in one way the vegetation was of service, for in climbing it did to put your foot against, and to draw yourself up by. I was first, and could warn Molly of the

cracks, and we never doubted we should find a better way for returning.

I never saw anything like the birds. They seemed amazed at our disturbing their haunts, and flew out with strange cries from amid the ivy. The ravens made me almost uncomfortable: their great wings flapped so heavily, and their croak was so discordant, I sometimes fancied they would swoop in my face, but of course that would only have been at nesting time, and there was no real cause for fear.

I pulled off some of the lichens for grandfather, and got a nice piece of spreading fringe-moss, and once or twice, when we came to a good place, we sat down and had a rest. Each time Molly asked me whether I did not think we had gone far enough, but I begged her to come further, picturing what a thing 'twould be to tell the Copplestones about the eagles. We got, too, to some easier walking, and the view was so beautiful that we kept longing to see more of it.

But once I started back with both astonishment and fright, catching sight of a pit to the very brink of which I had walked, never thinking to find one here. And this looked so deep and strange that we could not understand what it could be, though Molly and I

"MOLLY AND I HELD EACH OTHER TIGHT."

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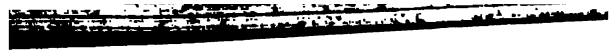

held each other tight, and looked over with awe. We had never heard what is really the case, and gives some danger to the spot, that there were tin workings in old days on Dewerstone Rock, and that the ancient pits remained, though greatly hidden by the clambering plants which had spread themselves so largely in all directions. Molly again suggested our finding an easier path down and following it, but gave way to my wish, which seemed only to grow stronger and stronger. I should have liked to stay and see a sunset from the rock, but to that I was certain she would not consent.

The last hard piece of climbing really had so many difficulties, that I might have yielded and turned back in the middle if it had been possible. But it was not. There was nothing to be done but to push on with every sense on the alert, and to hope that we should not need to return by the same very unpromising descent.

When we reached a firmer foothold, and could breathe and look round us, how lovely it was! Down below the brawling river, all around the wide expanse of undulating moor, of hill and dale, of lines softly sweeping, of flying shadows, and the rich colouring

which heather and bracken give as the day verges towards sunset. And, as usual, there was the exhilaration of the air, and the faint smell of peat-smoke. We laughed for joy at being there, Molly and I, and sat down that we might look our fill.

But all the time, oddly enough, I was not without a secret uneasiness as to our getting down the rock. Molly seemed to have very little fear, and to make no doubt that we should find some easier way, and after a while jumped up and proposed that we should go and look, as it was time for us to be thinking about home. We had not gone far before we were stopped by a great block of granite, and in the other direction were startled again by a tin pit, and after we had searched as much as we could, we looked at each other with a feeling of dismay, for there seemed absolutely no way less perilous than that by which we had come up, at any rate none that looked much less so from the top. Molly turned pale.

"How shall we ever do it!" she said in a low voice.

I could not answer. I had that feeling which sometimes comes over one, that if one begins to think 'twill be fatal. The only thing I could do was just to keep

before me the fact that we had to get down somehow, and therefore that it must be done. Molly remembered a piece of comfort the next moment.

"They know where we are, so we can't be lost, even if we have to stay and wait."

That did come as a consolation, but yet John Coombes often did not return home until very late, and the idea of climbing down the rock by dark, with those horrible pits gaping about one, was not agreeable. The first part of the descent was the worst: or so I fancied. I begged Molly to keep close to me, and, as I let myself down, to follow exactly after me, and I knew that having me in front would take off any dizziness that might seize her, and sometimes, by placing my shoulder against the rock, it would give her a sort of foothold. But the last bit gave no chance of that, 'twas obliged to be a sort of slip and slide, with a hope to be brought up somehow at the end of it, as we were, though with a great rent in my frock. And then we sat down to pant and laugh, and felt pretty sure that we had nothing worse to go through than had already been done.

We were on a sort of sloping rocky terrace, with a bush of broom growing out close to us from a cleft in

the granite. And the river was hidden from us, though we could hear its soft rush, as it swept along towards Shaugh Bridge. Molly was the first to say she was rested, and to jump up, and being in high spirits at the way she had come down that last piece, she declared she should be the one to choose the side for our next descent, and ran merrily to prevent my getting in front of her. Oh, Molly, Molly, shall I ever forget that moment! the light pretty figure dancing before me, and the next moment a crash, a blank!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE IVY TRAIL.

I HAVE never understood how it was I did not go down after Molly. It seems to me that I threw out my arms towards her, and that something stopped me on the very brink of that awful pit, and held me back. Any way, now I humbly thank Him to whose mercy I owe it.

But, in the agony of the moment it seemed dreadful to feel that I was not with her. I do not think there was room for any other thought but one great horror, a blank, terrible horror. How long it and its silence lasted I cannot tell. Then, I know that I knelt down on the edge of the pit, and passionately tore at the treacherous plants which now hung inwards, uprooted and broken, and called with all my might, "Molly, Molly, Molly!" and heard the flap of

a raven's wing, and its hoarse croak over my head, for answer.

Was that all?

For how many years of one's life do moments like these count, I wonder? Time might have come to an end for all the good it is in measuring them. The creeping ivy would not be torn aside, the long festoons of clematis hung like a dreadful veil, though I clutched and caught at them, and flung them aside in great handfuls.

Then something fell on my ear.

Not a cry, nor a call. It was more like a little fluttering sob. It seemed as if it were my own name just breathed, "Nan!"

"Molly, Molly!" I cried.

Silence again. Then certainly I heard the words,—

"Nan, are you there?"

Oh! Infinite Mercy, was she saved? All my senses seemed to come back. I laid myself flat on the ground, and stretched my head over, and put aside the tangled mass quite quietly, and said,—

"Here I am, Molly, quite close. Tell me that you are not hurt."

For I could see her! Our darling, who I thought

had passed for ever out of our sight, I could see her at no great distance below. Where she had fallen, perhaps time or falling waters had scooped the mouth of the pit, and a sort of ridge had caught her, but close, oh, so close! there was the gaping blackness—and only I above, and how could I get at her?

Her voice came up stronger,—

"I don't think I am hurt. Are you safe, Nan?"

"Quite, quite safe."

I saw her cover her face with one hand; the other she was leaning back upon, as if from the horror of that darkness. I think she was praying.

I got up and ran round the sides of the pit to see if there were any means by which I could let myself down to her, but it was absolutely impossible. The edges of it overhung it, so as to be quite unsafe even to stand upon; and though I believe I could have ventured anything at that moment, I knew the only chance, humanly speaking, for Molly lay in the help that I could bring her, and that for her sake I must be very prudent. Even now I heard her calling wildly to me,—

"Don't go away! Nan, Nan, where are you? Don't go away!"

"I am here, Molly, indeed I am! I am not going away for so much as a yard," I cried, with a sinking heart.

"I get giddy! I daren't move!" she said in the same tone, and I knew matters must be bad.

"Keep looking up," I cried, stretching over again as I had done before. "Look up at me."

"If I had something I could hold! It all seems to crumble away!" she exclaimed.

I snatched at some long branches of ivy and traveller's joy, and knotted them together as well as I could, and let them down to her. Alas, how feeble a support! and yet I could give nothing better. But it seemed to comfort her wonderfully to know that I had the other end of it. Then I said, as clearly as I could,—

"Molly, dear, they are sure to come for us here, but if you could bear to let me go, I might bring help much more quickly."

I said this, but I thought with trembling how long it might be before I found it, and the horror of leaving her in that position seemed more than I could bear. Still I dreaded her powers not holding out, and the return of that sickening dizziness.

"No," she said, very quickly. "The only thing that keeps me is the knowing that you are there."

Then I said, with what cheerfulness was to be had,—

"The sun will set very soon now, and they are sure to come and look for us. I should not wonder at hearing their voices at any time."

She made no answer to this, perhaps because she knew I had said it more to comfort ourselves than because I had any real hope. But presently she said, quietly,—

"Can you break off a little more of that ivy? If it were not there, I should have a better view of the sky." And then presently, "I am glad 'tis sunset, Nan."

I *would* not ask her why. I knew she had always said she should like to pass away with the day, at the time when those glorious lights are all abroad. And they were out now, shining with a wonderful glow on the very rock on which we were standing, and edging some of the clouds with liquid fire.

It seemed to me as if there were a long silence after that, and though I longed to say something and to keep up her courage, I could do nothing but watch

her with an agony which no sorrow has ever given me since. I cried out at last, unable to bear it,—

"Molly, dear, speak to me!"

Her voice seemed very faint when she answered,—

"Do you think you could say the ninety-first Psalm? I have been trying to repeat it to myself, but the words will not all come."

It was one that mother had made each of us learn by heart. Did she ever think how I should say it, and how her Molly would hear it down in the darkness? When I had finished, I heard her repeating one of the verses softly over and over again.

"'My God, in Him will I trust.' Yes, I do, I do. Nan, is it getting darker?"

"The sun is at its lowest," I said. "They will soon come, I am sure. See, Molly, I shall tighten our rope: now you can feel me better."

"I do not think I can cling much longer," she said, "my strength seems to fail me. Oh, Nan, my George, and Father, and Dick, and little Madge—there are so many of them—they will all be sorry. But you will tell them."

"Hush, hush!" I cried in an agony. But the

next minute, when she was silent, it was so much worse, that I implored her not to mind what I said, but to speak to me. Then I caught her own name, which she was repeating to herself.

"Mother Molly—no, not that; but I have tried, mother."

The voice seemed to come up to me like a little sigh, no more. And it had grown so dark where she was, that, strain my eyes as I might, all her crouching figure had become indistinct: I could only see the paleness of an upturned face, I, so near her, yet so helpless!

"Don't be frightened, Molly," I said hurriedly, "I will not go away, I will not let go our rope for an instant, but I am going to call."

I stood up and looked round me in despair, at the rock, at the great range of moor lying cold and dim in the fading light, at the solitude, the desolation—God forgive me, forgetting almost that He was there—and then I shouted with all my might, again and again. Shouted? Alas! how feeble it sounded, even to me! A little plaything for the air—no more; and death close by, and I could do nothing.

I stretched myself once more over the hole.

"Molly!"

Oh, the agony of the silence that followed! But she was there, I could see her.

"Molly! Molly!"

"Is it you, George? good-bye, dear."

"Molly, Molly!" I cried again, "listen, listen, my darling, I am going to make this rope stronger, and to let myself down by it, and get you up."

With what tremulous, powerless hands, I knotted together the slight plants! What hopelessness there lay in it all, what a consciousness that it was hopeless! And all the time I talked to her, and implored her to hold fast, and caught now and then a feeble sound like one of our names. Then I tied the weak strands round the root of a bush of broom, and took hold of it to trust my weight to its weakness, and looked once more round at the silent moor to say good-bye to earth and sky.

What was that?

With the ivy in my hand, I stood still and listened. "It was a bird," I said to myself. It came again—it was a *cry*.

"Molly, Molly!" I screamed, "they are coming! You are saved, my darling! do you hear?"

And then I stood up again and shouted with all my might: I longed but did not dare to turn round,—did not dare, because I was so afraid of leaving her; and even now, with the joy there came an awful fear, for it did not seem to me that she answered me at all. It might have been from a rushing in my own head which dulled my hearing, but—if she were unconscious in that place, where a single movement might let her slip down, down!

CHAPTER XX.

RETURN.

"Let Gallia mourn! th' insulting foe,
Who sees by all the winds that blow
Her treasures wafted to the coast,
She insolently deem'd was lost.

* * * * *

Like her own oak, the forest's king,
Tho' Britain feel the blows around,
E'en from the steel's inflictive sting
New force she gains, new scyons spring,
And flourish from the wound."

(*Ode for His Majesty's Birthday*, 1779.
By W. Whitehead, Esq., Poet Laureate.)

I STOOD breathless, immovable. Had it been all a dream? No other cry reached my ear, and yet I was sure I had heard one. I called again and again, and then, close under the rock, nearer than I had dared hope for, there came an answer—more

than one answer—two, and three, in men's voices, some which seemed familiar, though I could scarce believe it.

"Which side?" cried some one. Was it Dick?

"Here, here!" I screamed. "Help! help Molly!"

I have thought since that the minutes when the help I called for was so near—and yet, as I dreaded, perhaps too late—were the worst of all. I longed to rush to the edge, to hasten them, to show exactly where we were, but I could not leave her, could not loose that slender hold upon life which seemed somehow to belong to the ivy rope. I spoke to her constantly, getting no answer, and called again, till my voice ended altogether for hoarseness. Once or twice a voice called back to me, and then suddenly I heard the breaking of branches, and the sound of hard breathing close by; some one was coming up with extraordinary quickness, so that I need not have cried to him, as I did, to hasten. The next moment he had swung himself up; a strange figure with a white face, and clothes hanging in ribbons, and I saw, though my mind had no room for wonder or any thought but the one that filled it, that 'twas George Copplestone.

"Where?" he said, with almost a fierceness in the word.

I pointed downwards, and he flung himself on the ground with a groan, and stretched over, and cried out most bitterly, "Molly! my Molly!" The next instant he was up again and dragging a piece of rope from his pocket. "Pray Heaven it may not be too short!" he muttered, and shouted again with all his force, "This way, Dick! Coombes! Quick, men!"

When Coombes came, having mounted by another way, and Dick close behind him, George was knotting the rope under his arms, and flung them the end without a word. I saw him going over, and the edge of the pit breaking away under his weight, and then I fell down on my knees and prayed, and I recollect no more.

It was the touch of cold water which brought me to my senses, and I opened my eyes to a dim sky, with a dull wonder where I was, and why Dick's face should be so near. My next impulse was to cry out for Molly.

"She is here, she is safe, Nan," said Dick with most eager tenderness. "Drink a little of this, dear. You are better, aren't you?"

For I believe, with both of us stretched side by

"I SAW HIM GOING OVER, AND THE EDGE OF THE PIT BREAKING."

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side, the poor men hardly believed either would come to life again, and Dick was very grateful to me for doing it. Molly lay much longer. George had found her insensible, her hands still clutching the ivy, which I believe had helped to keep her motionless, slight though it was. How he got her up I have never been able to think, but now he was kneeling by her, his eyes riveted on her face with a dread which 'twould have gone to any one's heart to see. John Coombes was talking with emphatic slowness.

"Ef I'd thoft of their climmin' thiccy rock, I'd ha' putt a stop tu't. I heerd 'em tellin', but niver comed in my head as they'd go oop."

Nobody took any notice of him: we were all watching Molly. When, at length, she gave a little sigh and turned her head, the joy seemed as great as the anguish had been, and 'twould be hard to say more. But it was very slowly that her senses came back to her, and that she took in where she was, and who was bending over her; and even then she was so weak that I, for one, wondered how we should ever get her down the rock. George never hesitated any more than he had throughout. He fastened the rope to him again, and took her in his arms, and told her to

shut her eyes, and then, with one look in her sweet face, he carried her down without a helping hand from any one. John Coombes, who knew the rock well, had the end of the cord, and shouted to him just where to go, for the darkness made the holes more dangerous; and Dick and I got down together as we could, I having an odd trembling all about me which made me glad of a hand. There at the bottom was Harry standing, holding Jack, and George with Molly still in his arms, as if he could not bear to give her up.

What a strange ride home that was, in the dewy stillness of the evening: Molly and I on the old horse, and George and Dick on either side. 'Twas not so dark but that we could see all the sweep of the moor, dusky outlines stretching far away. Overhead the stars were beginning to shine out with a grave sweet radiance, and the fresh faint smell of heather and wild thyme came up from our feet, and there were happy hearts among us whose thankfulness was too deep for words.

I don't think till now that I had had any room in my mind for wonder that George and Dick should have come to us. Yet how wonderful 'twas!—and

yet again, when Dick had explained it to me in a low voice, most simple! For it seemed that, whether from being drawn away by a hope of taking our fleet, or from not knowing fully how defenceless the town lay, or from the expectation of the stormy season when they would have no safe anchorage,—at any rate, from some merciful interposition of our God in our behalf, the French and Spanish ships had sailed away from Plymouth, and our admiral was watching them. Something had happened to the "Invincible" which needed repairs, and she had come into Plymouth for a few days, and Father gave George Copplestone a short leave to come up with Dick and fetch us back. Fine fun they had had, riding up a couple of old cart-horses, and thinking they could get a cart up at the farm! Just as they reached there, they met John Coombes and Harry coming home earlier than usual; and when 'twas found we were not back, John showed uneasiness about the tin-pits, saying he had never thought of our going up beyond just a little way. George took alarm at once, and would set off and take a piece of rope and some brandy with him, besides the pack-horse; and all the rest fell out as I have told it. But how merciful a Guidance 'twas

which had led them there at that very moment, no words of mine can ever come near expressing.

And the knowing they had started took off some of grandfather's fear, which otherwise might have been too great for him. Betty persuaded him that the meeting and all the explanations would delay us, and boldly declared we should not be home till after dark, though in her own heart she was most uneasy. Harry, who had spoken but little, ran ahead of us to say that we were coming, and brought them out; and when George had lifted off Molly by the gate, she put her arms round grandfather's neck and clung to him, and I saw Dick hide his face against the horse's neck.

We got her to bed as quickly as we could, though she was like herself again, and would have it that I was the one to be cossetted. But once in the night a little noise awoke me, and there was Mother Molly kneeling at the window, and I caught in a whisper the words of the ninety-first Psalm.

The next day seemed one whirl from beginning to end; and when I think of it, I can think of little but Betty. She was here, there, and everywhere, in a state of wild excitement in going back to Plymouth, and wondering how Thirza and Izzy could get on

without her. Dick and Harry were up early to get a cart, which they managed, though 'twas not such a convenient one as Mr. Andrews's waggon; and Betty dragged down all our things, and put them in, and took them out, and was always changing. The very first thing she settled this time was the fish-kettle, which had never had anything in it but Harry's adder from the time it came. As for Molly, George would have her to himself; and, indeed, though she said nothing ailed her, she did not look fit for hard work, and there were plenty of hands. The saddest in the house was little Izzy. She cried most bitterly, but at last we found a way to cheer her by promising that she and her mother should come in to Plymouth next month, and spend a fortnight with us, and this, with the prospect of the sea and the ships and the houses, quite put an end to her tears. Madge did her part in the comforting by what brought herself a sharp pang, the giving her her doll.

A week ago 'twould have cost me more to leave the moor and the wood and my stream. . But Dewerstone Rock had taken away my present taste for adventures, so that I could not think of them without a shudder, and scarcely liked the others to be out of my sight.

And then at Plymouth there was Father—a joy we had not dared to hope was possible. And I knew Mrs. Harty was longing for us, and I began to have a yearning to see the house again, and to be thankful not to find it burnt. Polly seemed to know what was going on, for he chattered in the highest spirits, and when at last everything—Betty included—was got into the waggon, and John Coombes had actually given up half a day's work to see us off, and we had started three times, and three times stopped with screaming from Betty for things she had left behind, and little Izzy's hand had waved from her window, and a misty rain was sweeping down from the tors—Molly stretched out her arms to me and kissed me without a word. But I knew what she meant.

'Twas the happiest home-going! George and Dick walked the greater part of the way, and Harry and I a good deal. The first and softest touch of autumn had just reached the vales and woods, and the brightness of berry-time was in the hedges. Betty, whose mind had been a good deal depressed by the thought of how little she would find ready to her hand in the house—though we found when we got there that Mrs. Harty had cared for all that—was cheered

by the great basket of blackberries we brought her, and by-and-by, when we reached Boringdon camp, and she could see far away Plymouth Sound glittering in a gleam of sunlight, and no foreign vessels lying there to threaten us, she wiped her eyes and said she was sorry to think what Loveday had proved herself, but that she made no doubt 'twould all turn out for the best.

And so the cart went rumbling and bumping down towards Loughtor Mill, where even grandfather walked, and George and Molly drew off together. Mother Molly had said but little all that day, but there was a marvellous shining sweetness in her eyes, which made it no wonder that George should look at them so often. We all looked, indeed, feeling as if she had been given back to us from the dead.

And now we had got to Plympton St. Mary, and thought how we had passed through it with the other flying people that night. Now the bells were ringing merrily, and all was changed. More changed yet was Plymouth, for there 'twas like a gala, and the streets that had been so full of panic were gay with flags, and all the town was rejoicing at its deliverance, so that there was quite a confusion of gladness to pass

through before we could reach our own home; and that we found open and ready for us, Mrs. Harty's cook at the door, and the kitchen fire lit, and the windows open, and a nosegay of flowers on the sitting-room table. Not Father. It gave me a minute's disappointment, but George had always said he could not be there, though he would come up in the evening when George went back to the ship. I wanted him first to go off directly, and then to take me, but he would do neither the one nor the other, and I knew Father could not bear for us girls to go on board. George Copplestone came in with us, and worked hard at unlading the waggon, and would not let Molly so much as put a hand to anything. Indeed, I thought he had grown too masterful, and told her so, but she only laughed.

I had meant, of course, to be the first to see Father. George went off at last, to my great delight, after stopping twice as long as was necessary, and I was down in the parlour with grandfather, where I could watch from the window, and be near the door. But I suppose that Dewerstone Rock had tired me more than I knew, and the driving in and all, for while grandfather was talking gently about all that had happened, I

dropped off to sleep. For long afterwards my sleep was haunted by dreams of that awful pit and Molly, and they fell upon me now, but something stirred me to open my eyes, and there before me stood Father, with Mother Molly clinging to his arm, and both smiling at me, and in another moment my arms were round his neck.

"Why, my long Nan," he said, putting me from him, and looking, "you are grown out of all knowledge! And is this the way you keep watch? Fie, for shame!"

But he was only laughing. He could not get over the way I had shot up, perhaps owing to the kindly moor air which had strengthened us all. He came back, he said, to find two women in the house.

"And she has grown so thoughtful, Father," put in Molly with eagerness.

Well, the delight of that evening comes back to me now with a freshness which sometimes startles me. He had so much to hear and see, and now one began and then another with their separate stories. It was Dick who told him about M. de Lantenac in a straightforward manly way which none could have helped admiring; for it cost him something to tell, and

Father to hear, as one could see by the way he kept down his eyes and clenched his hand. Dick made so little excuse for himself, that no one would have understood the feeling for the French Count which ran through Plymouth, if Molly had not gently put in her word here and there, and repeated some of the things Mr. Newman had said, and how his fascination had got hold of older men than Dick.

When the story was finished, Father said briefly that 'twas well for Plymouth and him—Father—too, that the Frenchman came to his end as he did; and then he would speak no more about it before us. But Dick went back with him that night to the ship, and they had a long talk.

As for our Dartmoor experiences, he first called Betty into the room and thanked her for her faithfulness, and made her a present. Betty's eyes overflowed, and, when she tried to speak, she choked herself so that her cheeks were crimson and the tears streaming down them, and she most uncomfortable between her feelings and her sufferings, and what does the parrot do but call out "spake up, can't 'ee!" which was just what Betty herself used to say sometimes to Izzy, but very odd for him to bring out at that moment.

Father laughed a good deal to hear Harry's account of our adventures in the fog; and afterwards how he got pulled off the stones by a girl, which was a part he got through very quickly, and then we both talked as hard as we could about our mysterious stranger.

"Taller than you, Father."

"With a long beard."

"Strong?"

"Oh, I should think so!"

"And grumpy?"

"No, now. Not a bit."

I said this so indignantly that Father pulled my hair, and said he had a mind to run up the next day and see for himself, and perhaps he should find he was one of his sailors who deserted a year or two ago. But I think he was pleased that we had not been frightened at him.

As for what we had gone through the day before—which seemed at least a week ago—we had not come yet to be able to talk about it. George had told all that he could, but Molly trembled and turned pale at the first allusion, and it seemed almost more than Father could bear. He had her close to his side, and now and then looked at her in a way which showed

what thoughts were passing through his mind, and once hurriedly laid his hand on her head, as if to assure himself that he had her there, safe and sound.

For himself, he had not so much to tell as he wished, so he said. It had been trying work, beating about, all of them longing for a brush with the enemy, and yet kept back by orders. But they were hoping for better things, and he was anxious to have his repairs hastened so that they might get off after one more day. That was all, it seemed, we were to have of him; and it was very little, now that he was come. Molly was greatly pleased to hear the way Father spoke of George Copplestone—a good man and a brave officer, was what he called him, and it brought the colour back to her cheek more than I had yet seen it.

'Twas proposed the next day that we should go over to Mrs. Harty; but there came a message from her, that she meant to see us all together, and that nothing else would content her but to be brought to our house after dinner: such an event, that we could not make too much of it. And before that came Mr. Boscawen, with his wig quite straight, and everything about him as dapper as could be, and a whole budget full of news

of how this person and that had got through the panic, and how one family of his friends that were flying got upset in a quagmire, and another left a servant locked up in the house, which had to be broken into in order to have her out, and a third laded their coach so heavily that the springs broke, so that we seemed to have come off better than our neighbours. The person that Plymouth appeared most proud of was Mr. Bastard, who had been so prompt in calling out the Volunteers.

One walk I had with Father, all by myself, after Mrs. Harty had been and gone. 'Twas Molly managed it for me, knowing, as she did, how I always enjoyed such a walk. This was like the old ones, and yet different; for he had my hand in his, and yet talked to me as he had never talked before. We went up through the Hoe Gate, so as to look down on the Sound, which was all white and grey with the strong wind that was blowing; and he put me against the wall, and we looked over and enjoyed it: I better than Father, because I had not seen it for so long.

"Now," said Father suddenly, "show me where Harry and you went over that night."

And he would go down the path and make me point

out where we stood, and hear what M. de Lantenac had said, and how he read the letter, looking very stern all the while he listened to me. Then he put his hand on my shoulder and said, in a changed voice,—

"You and Harry were good children, Nan; if he had carried out that letter to the enemy, I think 'twould have broken my heart. Dick is as fine a lad as ever was born, but it will take him a good while to learn not to trust every fair speaker; and you girls must stand by your brothers and help them, as Mother Molly has ever done, GOD bless her!"

He lifted his hat as he stood there, and looked up. The wind was blowing his hair, and there was a brightness like tears in his eyes.

As Mother Molly has ever done, GOD bless her!

* * * * * *

Many good things came to her in after days, husband and children, and great love. But I used to think, when I looked at her, and I think now, when I go, as I often do, to the quiet little village churchyard where she rests with some of those most dear to her, that, of all these good things, Father's words must have been among the best. And I felt—not, I humbly

hope, envy of her, but—an intense longing that some day such words might be said of me, and a shame which forced the tears into my eyes to think of the impatience which made it difficult for me to forbear, which makes it difficult, yes, even now, when others might think I had had time enough given me in which to learn life's lessons. Well, they think so, and I don't wonder: my slowness over the task has been a constant marvel to me, yet not half so great a marvel as that other—the infinite Love which has borne so much and waited so patiently!

In another way, perhaps, I am not like other people. It is a pleasure to me to look back upon old days, and to gather together little things which belong to them: odd little relics they are, which will puzzle those who one day will gaze at them without any key to their value. For what will they say to bits of moss, and a few scarlet feathers, and the end of a letter of which the ink is yellow and faded and the words are only,—

"*—of one who, believe me, dear sir, is always your devoted and obliged*

"*Richard Bligh.*"

But perhaps what will seem most strange of all, and especially when they find 'tis to be laid with me in my

coffin, is a long trail of withered ivy, brittle and brown with age, and knotted together in the most hasty fashion.

A feeble thing once to have made the link between life and death!

THE END.

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